

The engines of the *Almirante Gomez* were going dead slow. Away up beside her monster funnels her siren blew dismally, *Whoo-oo-oo-oo!* and was silent for the regulation period, and blew desolately again into the clinging gray mist that ringed her all about.

Her decks were wet and glistening. Droplets of water stood upon the deck-stanchions, and dripped from the outer edge of the roof above the promenade deck. A thin, swirling fog lay soggy upon the water and the big steamer went dead slow upon her course, sending dismal and depressing blasts from her horn from time to time. It was barely possible to see from one side of the ship to the other. It was surely impossible to see the bow from a point half astern.

Charley Bell went forward along the promenade deck. He passed Senor Ortiz, ex-Minister of the Interior of the Argentine Republic. Ortiz bowed to him punctiliously, but Bell had a sudden impression that the Argentine's face was gray and ghastly. He checked himself and looked back. The little man was climbing the companion-ladder toward the wireless

room.

Bell slipped on toward the bow. He did not want to give an impression of furtiveness, but the *Almirante Gomez* was twelve days out of New York and Bell was still entirely ignorant of why he was on board. He had been called into the office of his chief in the State Department and told curtly that his request for leave of absence had been granted. And Bell had not asked for a leave of absence. But at just that moment he saw a rubber band on the desk of his immediate superior, a fairly thick rubber band which had been tied into a certain intricate knot. And Bell had kept quiet. He went to his apartment, found his bags packed and tickets to Rio via the *Almirante Gomez* in an envelope on his dressing-table, and went out and caught a train to the ship.

And that was all he knew. The siren up above blared dolefully into the fog. It was damp, and soggy, and depressing. The other passengers were under cover, and the decks seemed to be deserted. From the saloon came the sound of music. Bell pulled the collar of his light topcoat about his throat and strolled on

toward the bow.

He faced a row of steamer chairs. There was a figure curled up in one of them. Paula Canalejas, muffled up against the dampness and staring somberly out into the mist. Bell had met her in Washington and liked her a great deal, but he swore softly at sight of her in his way.

The afternoon before, he had seen a stoker on the *Almirante Gomez* pick up a bit of rope and absently tie knots in it while he exchanged Rabelasian humor with his fellows. He had not looked at Bell at all, but the knots he tied were the same that Bell had last seen tied in a rubber band on a desk in the State Department in Washington. And Bell knew a recognition signal when he saw one. The stoker would be off watch, just now, and by all the rules of reason he ought to be out there on the forecastle, waiting for Bell to turn up and receive instructions.

But Bell paused, lit a cigarette carefully, and strolled forward.

"Mr. Bell."

He stopped and beamed fatuously at her. It would have been logical for him to fall in love with her, and it is always desirable to seem logical. He had striven painstakingly to give the impression that he had fallen in love with her—and then had striven even more painstakingly to keep from doing it.

"Hullo," he said in bland surprise. "What are you doing out on deck?"

Brown eyes regarded him speculatively.

"Thinking," she said succinctly. "About you, Mr. Bell."

Bell beamed.

"Thinking," he confided, "is usually a bad habit, especially in a girl. But if you must think, I approve of your choice of subjects. What were you thinking about me?"

The brown eyes regarded him still more speculatively.

"I was wondering—" said Paula, glancing to either side, "I was wondering if you happen to be—er—a member of the United States Secret Service."

Bell laughed with entire naturalness.

"Good Lord, no!" he said amusedly. "I have a desk in the State Department building, and I read consular reports all day long and write letters bedeviling the consuls for not including unavailable statistics in their communications. That's my work. I'm on leave now."

She looked skeptical and, it may be, disappointed.

"You look as if you didn't believe me," said Bell, smiling. "I give you my word of honor I'm not a member of the United States Secret Service. Will that do to relieve your suspicions?"

"I believe you," she said slowly, "but it does not relieve my mind. I shall think about other people. I have something important to tell a member of the United States Secret Service."

Bell shrugged.

"I'm sorry," he said amiably, "that I can't oblige you by tipping one of them off. That's what you wanted me to do, isn't it?"

She nodded, and the gesture was very much like a dismissal. Bell frowned, hesitated, and went on. He was anxious to meet the stoker, but this....

The siren droned dismally over his head. Fog lay deep about the ship. The washing of the waves and dripping of water on the decks was depressing. It seemed to be getting thicker. Four stanchions ahead, the mist was noticeable. He found that he could count five, six, seven.... The eighth was indefinite. But a bar materialized in the fog before him, and the grayness drew away before him and closed in behind. When he was at the forward end of the promenade, looking down upon the forecastle deck, he was isolated. He heard footsteps some distance overhead. The watch officer up on the bridge. Bell glanced up and saw him as an indistinct figure. He waited until the officer paced over to the opposite side of the bridge. The air

throbbed and shook with the roaring of the siren.

Bell slipped over the edge of the rail and swung swiftly down the little ladder of iron bars set into the ship's structure. In seconds he had landed, and was down upon that terra incognita of all passengers, the deck reserved for the use of the crew.

A mast loomed overhead, with its heavy, clumsy derrick-booms. A winch was by his side. Oddments of deck machinery, inexplicable to a landsman, formed themselves vaguely in the mist. The fog was thicker, naturally, since the deck was closer to the water's edge.

"Hey!" growled a voice close beside him. "Passengers ain't allowed down here."

An unshaven, soot-smeared figure loomed up. Bell could not see the man save as a blur in the mist, but he said cheerfully:

"I know it, but I wanted to look. Seafaring's a trade I'd like to know something about."

The figure grunted. Bell had just given his word of honor that he wasn't a member of the Secret Service. He wasn't. But he was in the Trade—which has no official existence anywhere. And the use of the word in his first remark was a recognition signal.

"What is your trade, anyways?" growled the figure skeptically.

"I sharpen serpents' teeth from time to time," offered Bell amiably. He recognized the man, suddenly.

"Hullo, Jamison, you look like the devil."

Jamison drew nearer. He grunted softly.

"I know it. Listen closely, Bell. Your job is getting some information from Canalejas, Minister of War in Rio. He sent word up to Washington that he'd something important to say. It isn't treachery to Brazil, because he's a decent man. Seven Secret Service men have disappeared in South America within three months. They've found the eighth, and he's crazy. Something has driven him mad, and they say it's a devilish poison. He's a homicidal maniac,

returning to the United States in a straight-jacket. Canalejas knows what's happened to the Service men. He said so, and he's going to tell us. His daughter brought the news to Washington, and then instead of going on to Europe as she was supposed to do, she started back to Rio. You're to get this formation and pass it on to me, then try to keep your skin whole and act innocent. You were picked out because, as a State Department man, hell could be raised if you vanished. Understand?"

Bell nodded.

"Something horrible is going on. Secret Service can't do anything. The man in Asunción isn't dead—he's been seen—but he's cut loose. And Service men don't often do that. He don't report. That means the Service code may have been turned over, and hell to pay generally. It's up to the Trade."

"I've got it," said Bell. "Here are two items for you. Miss Canalejas just said she suspected I was Secret Service. I convinced her I wasn't. She says she has important information for a Service man."

The brawny figure of the stoker growled.

"Damn women! She was told somebody'd be sent to see her father. She was shown a recognition-knot with the outsider's variation. Given one, for father. That'll identify you to him. But she shouldn't have talked. Now, be careful. As nearly as we know, that chap in the straight-jacket was given some poison that drove him insane. There are hellish drugs down there. Maybe the same thing happened to others. Look out for yourself, and give me the information Canalejas gives you as quickly as God will let you. If anything happens to you, we want the stuff to get back. Understand?"

"Of course," said Bell. He carefully did not shiver as he realized what Jamison meant by anything happening to him. "The other item is that Ortiz, ex-Minister of the Interior of the Argentine, is scared to death about something. Sending radios right and left."

"Umph," growled Jamison. "One of our men vanished in Buenos Aires. Watch him. You're friendly?"

"Yes."

"Get friendlier. See what he's got. Now shoo."

Bell swung up the ladder again. Mist opened before him and closed again behind. He climbed over the rail to the promenade deck, and felt a little flare of irritation. There was a figure watching him.

He slipped to the deck and grinned sheepishly at Paula Canalejas. She stood with her hands in the pockets of her little sport coat, regarding him very gravely.

"I suppose," said Charley Bell sheepishly, "that I look like a fool. But I've always wanted to climb up and down that ladder. I suppose it's a survival from the age of childhood. At the age of seven I longed to be a fireman."

"I wonder," said Paula quietly. "Mr. Bell"—she stepped close to him—"I am taking a desperate chance. For the sake of my father, I wish certain things known. I think that you are an honorable man, and I think that

you lied to me just now. Go and see Senor Ortiz. Your government will want to know what happens to him. Go and see him quickly."

Bell felt the same flare of irritation as before. Women do not follow rules. They will not follow rules. They depend upon intuition, which is sometimes right, but sometimes leads to ungodly errors. Paula was right this time, but she could have been wholly and hopelessly wrong. If she had talked to anyone else....

"My child," said Bell paternally—he was at least two years older than Paula—"you should be careful. I did not lie to you just now. I am not Secret Service. But I happen to know that you have a tiny piece of string to give your father, and I beg of you not to show that to anyone else. And—well—you are probably watched. You must not talk seriously to me!"

He lifted his hat and started astern. He was more than merely irritated. He was almost frightened. Because the Trade, officially, does not exist at all, and everybody in the Trade is working entirely on his own; and because those people who suspect that

there is a Trade and dislike it are not on their own, but have plenty of resources behind them. And yet it is requisite that the Trade shall succeed in its various missions. Always.

The Government of the United States, you understand, will admit that it has a Secret Service, which it strives to identify solely with the pursuit of counterfeiters, postal thieves, and violators of the prohibition laws. Strongly pressed, it will admit that some members of the Secret Service work abroad, the official explanation being that they work abroad to forestall smugglers. And at a pinch, and in confidence, it may concede the existence of diplomatic secret agents. But there is no such thing as the Trade. Not at all. The funds which members of the Trade expend are derived by very devious bookkeeping from the appropriations allotted to an otherwise honestly conducted Department of the United States Government.

Therefore the Trade does not really exist. You might say that there is a sort of conspiracy among certain people to do certain things. Some of them are

government officials, major and minor. Some of them are private citizens, reputable and otherwise. One or two of them are in jail, both here and abroad. But as far as the Government of the United States is concerned, certain fortunate coincidences that happen now and then are purely coincidences. And the Trade, which arranges for them, does not exist. But it has a good many enemies.

The fog-horn howled dismally overhead. Mist swirled past the ship, and an oily swell surged vaguely overside and disappeared into a gray oblivion half a ship's length away. Bell moved on toward the stern. It was his intention to go into the smoking-room and idle ostentatiously. Perhaps he would enter into another argument with that Brazilian air pilot who had so much confidence in Handley-Page wing-slots. Bell had, in Washington, a small private plane that, he explained, had been given him by a wealthy aunt, who hoped he would break his neck in it. He considered that wing-slots interfered with stunting.

He had picked out the door with his eye when he espied a small figure standing by the rail. It was Ortiz,

the Argentine ex-Cabinet Minister, staring off into the grayness, and seeming to listen with all his ears.

Bell slowed up. The little stout man turned and nodded to him, and then put out his hand.

"Senor Bell," he said quietly, "tell me. Do you hear airplane motors?"

Bell listened. The drip-drip-drip of condensed mist. The shuddering of the ship with her motors going dead slow. The tinkling, muted notes of the piano inside the saloon. The washing and hissing of the waves overside. That was all.

"Why, no," said Bell. "I don't. Sound travels freakishly in fog, though. One might be quite close and we couldn't hear it. But we're a hundred and fifty miles off the Venezuelan coast, aren't we?"

Ortiz turned and faced him. Bell was shocked at the expression on the small man's face. It was drained of all blood, and its look was ghastly. But the rather fine dark eyes were steady.

"We are," agreed Ortiz, very steadily indeed, "but I—I have received a radiogram that some airplane should fly near this ship, and it would amuse me to hear it."

Bell frowned at the fog.

"I've done a good bit of flying," he observed, "and if I were flying out at sea right now, I'd dodge this fog bank. It would be practically suicide to try to alight in a mist like this."

Ortiz regarded him carefully. It seemed to Bell that sweat was coming out upon the other man's forehead.

"You mean," he said quietly, "that an airplane could not land?"

"It might try," said Bell with a shrug. "But you couldn't judge your height above the water. You might crash right into it and dive under. Matter of fact, you probably would."

Ortiz's nostrils quivered a little.

"I told them," he said steadily, "I told them it was not wise to risk...."

He stopped. He looked suddenly at his hands, clenched upon the rail. A depth of pallor even greater than his previous terrible paleness seemed to leave even his lips without blood. He wavered on his feet, as if he were staggering.

"You're sick!" said Bell sharply. Instinctively he moved forward.

The fine dark eyes regarded him oddly. And Ortiz suddenly took his hands from the railing of the promenade deck. He looked at his fingers detachedly. And Bell could see them writhing, opening and closing in a horribly sensate fashion, as if they were possessed of devils and altogether beyond the control of their owner. And he suddenly realized that the steady, grim regard with which Ortiz looked at his hands was exactly like the look he had seen upon a man's face once, when that man saw a venomous snake crawling toward him and had absolutely no weapon.

Ortiz was looking at his fingers as a man might look at cobras at the ends of his wrists. Very calmly, but with a still, stunned horror.

He lifted his eyes to Bell.

"I have no control over them," he said quietly. "My hands are useless to me, Senor Bell. I wonder if you will be good enough to assist me to my cabin."

Again that deadly pallor flashed across his face. Bell caught at his arm.

"What is the matter?" he demanded anxiously. "Of course I'll help you."

Ortiz smiled very faintly.

"If any airplane arrives in time," he said steadily, "something may be done. But you have rid me of even that hope. I have been poisoned, Senor Bell."

"But the ship's doctor...."

Ortiz, walking rather stiffly beside Bell, shrugged.

"He can do nothing. Will you be good enough to open this door for me? And"—his voice was hoarse for an instant—"assist me to put my hands in my pockets. I cannot. But I would not like them to be seen."

Bill took hold of the writhing fingers. He saw sweat standing out upon Ortiz's forehead. And the fingers closed savagely upon Bell's hands, tearing at them. Ortiz looked at him with a ghastly supplication.

"Now," he said with difficulty, "if you will open the door, Senor Bell...."

Bell slid the door aside. They went in together. People were making the best of boresome weather within, frankly yawning, most of them. But the card-room would be full, and the smoking-room steward would be busy.

"My cabin is upon the next deck below," said Ortiz through stiff lips. "We—we will descend the stairs."

Bell went with him, his face expressionless.

"My cabin should be unlocked," said Ortiz.

It was. Ortiz entered, and, with his hands still in his pockets, indicated a steamer-trunk.

"Please open that." He licked his lips. "I—I had thought I would have warning enough. It has not been so severe before. Right at the top...."

Bell flung the top back. A pair of bright and shiny handcuffs lay on top of a dress shirt.

"Yes," said Ortiz steadily. "Put them upon my wrists, please. The poison that has been given to me is—peculiar. I believe that one of your compatriots has experienced its effects."

Bell started slightly. Ortiz eyed him steadily.

"Precisely." Ortiz, with his face a gray mask of horror, spoke with a steadiness Bell could never have accomplished. "A poison, Senor Bell, which has made

a member of the Secret Service of the United States a homicidal maniac. It has been given to me. I have been hoping for its antidote, but—Quick! Senor Bell! Quick! The handcuffs!"

Chapter 2

The throbbing of the engines went on at an unvarying tempo. There was the slight, almost infinitesimal tremor of their vibration. The electric light in the cabin wavered rhythmically with its dynamo. From the open porthole came the sound of washing water. Now and then a disconnected sound of laughter or of speech came down from the main saloon.

Ortiz lay upon the bed, exhausted.

"It is perhaps humorous, Senor Bell," he said presently, in the same steady voice he had used upon the deck. "It is undoubtedly humorous that I should call upon you. I believe that you are allied with the Secret Service of your government."

Bell started to shake his head, but was still. He said nothing.

"I am poisoned," said Ortiz. He tried to smile, but it was ghastly. "It is a poison which makes a man mad in a very horrible fashion. If I could use my hands—and could trust them—I would undoubtedly shoot myself. It would be entirely preferable. Instead, I hope—"

He broke off short and listened intently. His forehead beaded.

"Is that an airplane motor?"

Bell went to the port and listened. The washing of waves. The throbbing of the ship's engines. The dismal, long-drawn-out moaning of the fog-horn. Nothing else.... Yes! A dim and distant muttering. It drew nearer and died away again.

"That is a plane," said Bell. "Yes, It's out of hearing now."

Ortiz clamped his jaws together.

"I was about to speak," he said steadily, "to tell you—many things. Which your government should know.

Instead, I ask you to go to the wireless room and have the wireless operator try to get in touch with that plane. It is a two-motored seaplane and it has a wireless outfit. It will answer the call M.S.T.R. Ask him to use his directional wireless and try to guide it to the ship. It brings the antidote to the poison which affects me."

Bell made for the door. Ortiz raised his head with a ghastly smile.

"Close the door tightly," he said quietly. "I—I feel as if I shall be unpleasant."

Closing the door behind him, Bell felt rather like a man in a nightmare. He made for the stairway, bolted for the deck, and fairly darted up the ladder to the wireless room.

"Ortiz sent me," he said to the operator. "You heard that plane just now. See if you can get it."

The operator looked up at him beneath a green eyeshade and grinned crookedly.

"Talking to 'em now," he said.

The key flicked up and down, and a tiny dancing spark leaped into being and vanished beneath its contact-point. The wireless room was dark save for the bright, shaded light above the sending table. A file of sent messages by an elbow. A pad for messages received was by a hand. Stray wreaths of tobacco smoke floated about the room, leaping into view as they drifted beneath the lamp.

"Is he bad?" asked the operator fascinatedly, his eyes fixed on his key.

Bell felt his eyelids flicker.

"Very bad," he said shortly.

"They tell me," said the operator and shuddered, "your hands get working and you can't stop 'em.... I'm playing, I am! I'm playing The Master's game!"

The key stopped. He listened.

"They're going to try to swoop over the ship and drop it," he said a moment later. "I don't think they can. But tell Ortiz they're going to try."

Bell's eyes were narrow. It is not customary for a radio operator on a passenger ship to speak of an ex-Cabinet Minister of the Argentine Republic by his surname only. It bespeaks either impertinence or a certain very peculiar association. Bell frowned imperceptibly for an instant, thinking.

"You've—had it?" he asked sharply.

"God, no! I never took the chance! I saw the red spots once, and I went to Rib—Say! You got a password?"

He was staring up at Bell. Bell shrugged.

"I'm trying to help Senor Ortiz now."

The operator continued to stare, his eyes full of suspicion. Then he grimaced.

"All right. Go tell him they're going to drop it."

Bell went out. Gray fog, and washing seas, and the big ship ploughing steadily on toward the south.... The horn blared, startlingly loud and unspeakably doleful. Bell listened for other sounds. There were none.

Down the steep ladder to the promenade deck. Paula Canalejas nodded to him.

"I saw you speak to Senor Ortiz," she said quietly.
"You see?"

Bell was beginning to have a peculiar, horrible suspicion. It was incredible, but it was inevitable.

"I think I see," he said harshly. "But I don't dare believe it. Keep quiet and don't speak to me unless I give you some sign it's safe! It's—hellish!"

He went inside and swiftly down the stairs. He found a steward hesitating outside the door of Ortiz's cabin. He touched Bell's arm anxiously as he was about to go in.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, and stammered. "I—I heard Mr. Ortiz making some—very strange noises, sir. I—I thought he was sick...."

"He is," said Bell grimly. "He told me he does not want a doctor, though. I'm looking after him."

He closed the door behind him, and Ortiz grinned at him. It was a horrible, a terrible grin, and Ortiz fought it from his face with a terrific effort of will. There was foam about his lips.

"*Dios!* It was—it was devilish!" he gasped. "Senor Bell, *amigo mio*, for the love of the good God get my revolver from my trunk. Give it to me...."

Bell said shortly: "The airplane just radioed that it's going to try to swoop overhead and drop a package on board the steamer. It doesn't dare alight in this fog."

"I think," gasped Ortiz, "I think it would be well to tie my feet. Tie them fast! If—if the package comes, if I—if I am unpleasant, knock me unconscious and pour it

into my mouth. I fear it is too late now. But try it...."

Through the port came the muttering of a seaplane's engines. The noise died away. Almost instantly the siren boomed hoarsely.

"Ah, *Dios!*" said Ortiz unsteadily. "There it is! Senor Bell, I think it is too late. Would you—would you assist me to go out on deck, where I might fling myself overboard? I—think I can control my legs so long."

"Steady!" said Bell, wrenched by the sight of the man before him fighting against unnameable horror. "Tell me—"

"It is poison," said Ortiz, his features fixed in a terrible effort of will. "A ghastly, a horrible poison of the *Indios* of Matto Grosso, in Brazil. It drives a man mad, murder mad. It is as if he were possessed by a devil. His hands first refuse to obey him. His feet next. And then his body. It is as if a devil had seized hold of his body and carried it about doing murder with it. A part of the brain is driven insane, and a man goes about shrieking with the horror of what crimes

his body commits until the poison reaches that portion of his brain as well. Then he is mad forever. That is what I face, *amigo mio*. That is why I beg you, I implore you, to kill me or assist me to the side of the ship so that I may fling myself overboard! The Master had it administered to me secretly, and demanded treason as the price of the antidote. He deman—"

Steady and strong, rising from a muttering to a steady roar, the sound of airplane motors came through the port. Bell started up.

"Hold fast," he snapped savagely. "I'll go get that package when it lands. Hold fast, I tell you! Fight it!"

He flung out of the cabin and raced up the stairs. The door to the deck was open. He crowded through a group of passengers who had discounted the dampness for the sake of a novelty—an airplane far out at sea—and raced up to the upper deck. The roaring noise was receding. The siren roared hoarsely. Then the noise came back.

For minutes, then, the ship seemed to play hide-and-

seek with the invisible fliers. The roaring noise overhead circled about, now near, now seeming very far away. And the siren sent its dismal blasts out into the grayness all about. Then, for an instant, a swiftly scudding shadow was visible overhead. It banked steeply and vanished, and seemed to have turned and come lower when it reappeared a moment later. It was not distinct, at first. It was merely a silhouette of darker gray against the all-enveloping mist. But its edges sharpened and became clear. One could make out struts, an aileron's trailing edge.

"Got nerve, anyhow," said Bell grimly.

It swept across the ship and disappeared, but the noise of its engines did not dwindle more than a little. The blast of the siren seemed to summon it back again. Once more it came in sight, and this time it dived steeply, flashed across the forecastle deck amid a hideous uproar, desperately, horribly close to the dangling derrick-cables, and was gone.

Bell had seen it more clearly than anyone else on the ship, perhaps. He saw a man in the pilot's cockpit

between wings and tail reach high and fling something downward, something with a long streamer attached to it. Bell had an instant's glimpse of the goggled face. Then he was darting forward, watching the thing that fell.

It took only a second. Two at most. But the thing seemed to fall with infinite deliberation, the streamer shivering out behind it. It fell at a steep slant, the forward momentum of the plane's speed added to its own drop. It swooped down, slanting toward the rail....

Bell groaned. It struck the rail itself, and bounced. A sailor flung himself toward it. The streamer slipped from his fingers and slithered over the side.

Bell was at the railing just in time to see it drop into the water. He opened his mouth to shout, and saw it sink. The last of the streamer followed the dropped object down into the green water when it was directly below him.

His hands clenched. Bell stared sickly at the spot

where it had vanished. An instant later he had whirled and was thrusting wide the wireless room door. The operator was returning to his key, grinning crookedly. He looked up sidewise.

"Tell them it went overside," snapped Bell. "Tell them to try it again. Ortiz is in hell! To try again! He's dying!"

The operator looked up fascinatedly, his fingers working his key.

"Is he—bad?" he asked with a shuddering interest.

"He's dying!" snarled Bell, in a rage because of his helplessness. He had forgotten everything but the fact that a man below decks was facing the most horrible fate that can overtake a man, and facing it with a steadfast gameness that made Bell's heart go out to him.

"They don't die," said the operator. He shuddered.

"They don't die of it."

His key stopped. He listened. His key clicked again.

"They only had two packages," he said a moment later. "They don't dare risk the other one. They say the fog ends twenty miles farther on. They're going to land up there and taxi back on the surface of the water. It shouldn't be more than half an hour."

He pushed himself back from the table with an air of finality.

"That's all. They've signed off."

Bell felt rage sweeping over him. The operator grinned crookedly.

"Better go down and tie him up," he said, and licked his lips with the fascinated air of one thinking of a known and terrifying thing. "Better tie him up tight. It'll be half an hour more."

Bell went down the companion-ladder. The promenade was crowded with passengers now, asking questions of each other. Some, frowning portentously,

thought the plane an unscheduled ocean flier who had lost his way in the fog.

Paula Canalejas was close to Bell as he shouldered his way through the crowd.

"That was for him?" she asked, without moving her lips.

Bell nodded.

"Tell him," she said quietly, "I—pray for him."

Bell nodded abruptly and went into the saloon. It was nearly empty. He wiped the sweat off his face. It was horrible to have to go down to Ortiz and tell him that at best it would be half an hour more....

Then there was a sudden scream below him, and then a shot. Bell jumped for the stairs, his heart in his throat, and saw Ortiz coming out of his stateroom door. His eyes were wide and agonized. His body....

Even in the incredibly short time before he reached

the bottom of the steps, Bell had time to receive the ghastly impression that Ortiz was sane, but that his body had gone mad. Ortiz's face was white and horrified. His hands and arms were writhing savagely, working at the handcuffs on his wrists. His legs were carrying him at a curious, padding trot down the hallway. One of the hands held a glittering revolver. A steward was crouched behind a couch, his face white and filled with stark terror. And Ortiz held his head back, as if struggling to hold back and control his body, which was under the control of a malignant demon.

"Out of the way!" cried Ortiz in a voice of terrible despair. "Get someone to shoot me! Kill me! I cannot —ah, *Dios!*"

The hands leveled the revolver in spite of him, while he flung his head from side to side in a frantic attempt to disturb their aim.



[Image description start: A wide, black and white illustration showing Agent Bell, in a dark suit, stopping just at the base of a set of stairs, with another man crouching behind a couch in front of him. On the other side of the couch is Ortiz, standing with his back towards both of them, his hands twisting the gun he holds towards his own head.

Image description end.]

"Close your eyes!" panted Bell, and hurled himself upon—whom? It was not Ortiz. It was Ortiz's body, gone mad and raging. The manacled arms flailed about frenziedly. The gun went off. Again. Again....

Bell struck. He knocked the Thing that possessed Ortiz's body off its feet. The hands groped for him.

They clubbed at him with the revolver. The feet kicked....

"Keep your eyes closed," gasped Bell, struggling to get the gun away from those horrible hands. "It—it can't see when you keep your eyes closed!"

Fighting insanely as the Thing was fighting, he could not identify it with Ortiz himself. One of the hands unclosed from about the revolver and clawed at his throat. It seemed to abandon that effort and attacked Ortiz's face in a frenzy of rage, struggling to claw his eyes open. The other held the weapon fast with maniacal strength.

At the horror of feeling one of his own manacled hands attacking his face savagely as if it were itself a sensate thing, Ortiz opened his eyes. They were wide with despair.

The hand with the revolver made a sudden movement, and Bell flung his weight upon it as the clutching hand pulled the trigger. There was a deafening report....

The body seemed to weaken suddenly in Bell's grip. It fought less and less terribly, though with no lessening of its savagery. He managed to get the revolver away from the hands that shook with unspeakable rage. He flung it away and stood panting.

There was a crowd of people suddenly all about the place. Staring, stunned, incredulous people who regarded Bell with a dawning, damning suspicion.

Ortiz spoke suddenly. His voice was weak, but it was steady, and it was full of a desperate relief.

"I wish to make a statement," he said sharply. "I—I wished to commit suicide for personal reasons. Senor Bell tried to dissuade me. The handcuffs upon my wrists were placed there with my consent. Senor Bell is my friend and has done me no wrong. I shot myself, with intention."

Bell beckoned to the ship's doctor.

"Get him bandaged up," he ordered harshly. "There's no need for him to die."

The body was writhing only feebly, now. Ortiz looked up at him, and managed a smile. Again there was that incredible impression of the body not belonging to Ortiz, or Ortiz as a sane and whole and honorable, admirable man, and the feebly writhing body with its clutching hands as some evil thing that had properly been defeated and killed.

The doctor bent down. It was useless, of course. He made futile movements.

"I wish to speak to my friend, Senor Bell," said Ortiz weakly. "I—I have not long."

Bell knelt beside him.

"The Master's—deputy in Rio," panted Ortiz weakly, almost in a whisper, "is—is Ribiera. In Buenos Aires I—I do not know. There was a man—the one who poisoned me—but I killed him. Secretly. I do not think—the Master knows. I pray that—"

He stopped. He could not speak again. But he smiled, and a few seconds later Bell clenched his hands. Ortiz

was gone.

Someone touched his arm. Paula Canalejas. He stared down at her and managed to smile. It was not a very successful smile. He drew a deep breath.

"I would like," said Bell wryly, "to think that, when I die, I will die as well as this man did. But I'm afraid I shan't."

But Paula said:

"The airplane can be heard outside. It seems to be moving on the surface."

And ten minutes later the plane loomed up out of the mist, queerly ungainly on the surface of the water. Its motors roared impatiently as if held in leash. It swung clumsily about, heading off out of sight in the fog to turn. It came back, sliding along the top of the water with its wing-tip floats leaving alternate streaks of white foam behind them. A man stood up in its after cockpit.

Bell crowded to the rail. The man—goggled and masked—held up a package as if to fling it on board. Bell watched grimly. But he saw that the pilot checked himself and looked up at the upper deck. Bell craned his neck. The wireless operator was waving wildly to the seaplane. He writhed his hands, and held his hand to his head as if blowing out his brains, and waved the plane away, frantically.

The pilot of the plane sat down. A moment later its motors roared more thunderously. It is not safe to alight on either land or water when fog hangs low, but there is little danger in taking off.

The seaplane shot away into the mist, its motors bellowing. The sound of its going changed subtly. It seemed to rise, and grow more distant.... It died away.

Bell halted at the top of the companion-ladder and saw the wireless operator, with a crooked, nervous grin upon his face.

CHAPTER 3

Bell saw what he was looking for, out in the throng of traffic that filled the Avenida do Acre, in Rio. He'd

seen it over the heads of the crowd, which was undersized, as most Brazilian crowds are, and he managed to get through the perpetual jam on the mosaic sidewalk and reach the curb.

He stood there and regarded the vehicles filling the broad avenue, wearing exactly the indifferent, half-amused air of a tourist with no place in particular to go and a great deal of time in which to go there. Taxis chuffed past, disputing right of way with private cars which were engaged in more disputes with other cars, all in the rather extraordinary bad temper and contentiousness which comes to the Latin-American when he takes the wheel of an automobile.

As if coming to an unimportant decision, Bell raised his hand to an approaching cab. It had two men on the chauffeur's seat. Of course. All taxis in Rio carry two men in front. One drives, and the other lights his cigarettes, makes witty comments upon passing ladies, and helps in collecting the fares from recalcitrant passengers. The extra man is called the "secretary," and he assists materially in giving an impression of haughty pride.

The taxi ground to the curb. The secretary reached behind him indifferently and opened the door. Bell did not glance at him. He stepped inside and settled down languidly.

"The Beira Mar," he said listlessly.

The taxi started off with a jolt. It is the invariable custom in Rio de Janeiro. And besides, it reminds the passenger that he is merely a customer, admitted to the cab on sufferance, and that he must be suitably meek to those who will presently blandly ignore the amount registered by the meter and demand a fare of from eight to twenty-seven times the indicated amount.

The cab went shooting down the Avenida do Acre toward the harbor. The Avenida do Acre is officially the Avenida Rio Branco, and it should be called by that name, only people forget. The Beira Mar, however, is named with entire propriety. It is actually the edge of the sea, and it is probably one of the two or three most beautiful driveways in the world.

The cab whirled past the crowded sidewalks. Incredible numbers of people, with an incredible variation in the shades of their complexions, moved to and from with the peculiar aimlessness of a Brazilian crowd. A stout and pompous negro politician from Bahia, wearing an orchid in his button-hole, rubbed elbows with a striking blonde lady of the sidewalks on his left, and forced a wizened little silk-hatted *parda*—approximately an octoroon—to dodge about him in order to progress. A young and languid person, his clothes the very last expiring gasp of fashion, fingered his stick patiently. He wore the painstakingly cultivated expression of bored disillusionment your young Brazilian dandy considers aristocratic. It was very probable that he shared a particularly undesirable bedroom with four or five other young men in order to purchase such clothing, but then, *farenda fita*—making a picture—is the national Brazilian sport.

Bell lighted a cigarette. It was not wise to regard the secretary of this particular taxi too closely, but if his face had been thickly smeared with coal dust, and if

he had had a two weeks' beard, and if he had been seen on the forecastle of the *Almirante Gomez*, one would have deduced him to be a stoker who had not used the name of Jamison.

The cab reached the Beira Mar, and turned to take the long route about the bay. It is one of the most beautiful views to be found anywhere, and tall apartment houses have been built along its whole length to capitalize the scenery. True, the more brightly-colored ladies of the capital have established themselves in vast numbers among these apartment houses, but in their languid promenades they add—let us say—the beauties of art to those of nature.

A voice spoke from the chauffeur's seat.

"Bell."

"Right," said Bell without moving. His eyes flickered, however, and he found the device Jamison had inserted. A speaking-tube of sorts. Not especially efficient, but inconspicuous enough. He stirred listlessly and got his lips near it.

"All right to talk?" he asked briefly.

"Shoot," said Jamison from the secretary's seat beside the chauffeur. "This man doesn't understand English, and he thinks I'm in a smuggling gang. He expects to make some money out of me eventually."

Bell spoke curtly, while the taxi rolled past the Morro da Gloria with its quaint old church and went along the winding, really marvelous driveway past many beaches, with the incredibly blue water beyond.

"Canalejas is out of town," he said. "It isn't known when he'll be back. I met his daughter at a dance at our Embassy here, and she told me. We didn't dare to talk much, but she's frightened. Especially after what happened to Ortiz. And I've met Ribiera, whom Ortiz named."

"I've been looking him up," growled Jamison through the speaking-tube.

Bell flicked the ash from his cigarette out the door, and went on quietly.

"He's trying to get friendly with me. I've promised to call at his house and have him take me out to the flying field. He has two planes, he tells me, a big amphibian and a two-seater. Uses them for commuting between Rio and his place back inland. He went out of his way to cultivate me. I think he suspects I'm trying to find out something."

"Which you are," said Jamison dryly. "You've found out that Ortiz was right at least about—"

Bell nodded, and frowned at himself for having nodded. He spoke into the mouthpiece by his head with an expressionless face.

"He's practically fawned upon by a bunch of important officials and several high ranking army officers. Suspecting what I do, I think he's got hold of a devil of a lot of power."

Jamison scowled in a lordly fashion upon a mere pedestrian who threatened to impede the movement of the taxicab by making it run over him.

"Ortiz," said Bell quietly, "told me he'd been poisoned, and treason asked as the price of the antidote. I've heard that the Brazilian Minister for Foreign Affairs went insane six months ago. I heard, also, that it was homicidal mania—murder madness. And I'm wondering if these people who fawn upon Ribiera aren't paying a price for—well—antidotes, or their equivalent. The Minister for Foreign Affairs may have refused."

"You're improving," said Jamison dryly. The taxi rounded a curve and a vista of sea and sand and royal palms spread out before it. "Yes, you're improving. But Ortiz spoke of Ribiera only as a deputy of The Master. Who is The Master?"

"God knows," said Bell. He stared languidly out of the window, for all the world to see. A tourist, regarding the boasted beauties of the Biera Mar.

"A deputy," said Jamison without emotion, "of some unknown person called The Master poisoned Ortiz in Buenos Aires. And Ortiz was an important man in the Argentine. Ribiera is merely the deputy of that same

unknown Master in Rio, and he has generals and state presidents and the big politicians paying court to him. If deputies in two countries that we know of have so much power, how much power has The Master?"

Silence. The taxi chugged steadily past unnoticed beauties and colorings. Rio is really one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

"It's like this," said Jamison jerkily. "Seven Service men vanish and one goes mad. You get two tips that the fate of Ortiz is the fate of the seven men—eight, in fact. We find that two men dispense a certain ghastly poison in two certain cities, at the orders of a man they call The Master. We find that those two men wield an astounding lot of power, and we know they're only deputies, only subordinates of the Master. We know, also, that the Service men vanished all over the whole continent, not in just those two cities. How many deputies has The Master? What's it all about? He wanted treason of Ortiz, we know. What does he want of the other men his deputies have enslaved? Why did he poison the Service men? And why—especially why—do two honorable men, officials

of two important nations, want to tip off the United States Government about the ghastly business? What's it got to do with our nation?"

Bell flung away his cigarette.

"That last question has occurred to me too," he observed, and carefully repressed a slight shiver. "I have made a guess, which is probably insane. I'm going to see Ribiera this afternoon."

"He already suspects you know too much," said Jamison without expression.

"I am"—Bell managed the ghost of a mirthless smile—"I am uncomfortably aware of it. And I may need an antidote as badly as Ortiz. If I do, and can't help myself, I'll depend on you."

Jamison growled.

"I simply mean," said Bell very quietly, "that I'd really rather not be—er—left alive if I'm mad. That's all. But Ortiz knew what was the matter with him before he

got bad off. I know it's a risk. I'm goose-flesh all over. But somebody's got to take the risk. The guess I've made may be insane, but if it's right one or two lives will be cheap enough as a price for the information. Suppose you chaps turn around and take me to Ribiera's house?"

There was a long pause. Then Jamison spoke in Portuguese to his companion. The taxi checked, swerved, and began to retrace its route.

"You're a junior in the Trade," said Jamison painstakingly. "I can't order you to do it."

Bell fumbled with his cigarette case.

"The Trade doesn't exist, Jamison," he said dryly. "And besides, nobody gives orders in The Trade. There are only suggestions. Now shut up a while. I want to try to remember some consular reports I read once, from the consul at Puerto Pachecho."

"What?"

"The consul there," said Bell, smiling faintly, "was an amateur botanist. He filled up his consular reports with accounts of native Indian medicinal plants and drugs, with copious notes and clinical observations. I had to reprove him severely for taking up space with such matters and not going fully into the exact number of hides, wet and dry, that passed through the markets in his district. His information will be entirely useless in this present emergency, but I'm going to try to remember as much of it as I can. Now shut up."

When the taxi swung off the Biera Mar to thread its way through many tree-lined streets—it is a misdemeanor, punishable by fine, to cut down a tree in Rio de Janeiro—it carried a young American with the air of an accomplished idler, who has been mildly bored by the incomparable view from the waterside boulevard. When it stopped at the foot of one of the slum covered *morros* that dot all Rio, and a liveried doorman came out of a splendid residence to ask the visitor his name, the taxi discharged a young American who seemed to feel the heat, in spite of the swift motion of the cab. He wiped off his forehead

with his handkerchief as he was assured that the Senhor Ribiera had given orders he was to be admitted, night or day. When the taxi drove off, it carried two men on the chauffeur's seat, of whom one had lost, temporarily, the manner of haughty insolence which is normally inseparable from the secretary of a taxicab chauffeur.

But though he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, Bell actually felt rather cold when he followed his guide through ornately furnished rooms, which seemed innumerable, and was at last left to wait in an especially luxurious salon.

There was a pause. A rather long wait. A distinctly long wait. Bell lighted a cigarette and seemed to become mildly bored. He regarded a voluptuous small statuette with every appearance of pleased interest. A subtly decadent painting seemed to amuse him considerably. He did not seem to notice that no windows at all were visible, and that shaded lamps lit this room, even in broad daylight.

Two servants came in, a footman in livery and the

major-domo. Your average *Carioca* servant is either fawning or covertly insolent. These two were obsequious. The footman carried a tray with a bottle, glass, ice, and siphon.

"The Senhor Ribiera," announced the major-domo obsequiously, "begs that the Senhor Bell will oblige him by waiting for the shortest of moments until the Senhor Ribiera can relieve himself of a business matter. It will be but the shortest of moments."

Bell felt a little instinctive chill at sight of the bottle and glasses.

"Oh, very well," he said idly. "You may put the tray there."

The footman lifted the siphon expectantly. Bell regarded it indifferently. The wait before the arrival of this drink had been longer than would be required merely for the announcing of a caller and the tending of a tray, especially if such a tray were a custom of the place. And the sending of a single bottle only, without inquiry into his preferences....

"No soda," said Bell. He poured out a drink into the tinier glass. He lifted it toward his lips, hesitated vaguely, and drew out his handkerchief again.

He sneezed explosively, and the drink spilled. He swore irritably, put down the glass, and plied his handkerchief vigorously. A moment later he was standing up and pouring the drink out afresh, from the bottle in one hand to the glass in the other. He up-tilted the glass.

"Get rid of this for me," he said annoyedly of the handkerchief.

He saw a nearly imperceptible glance pass between the footman and the major-domo. They retired, and Bell moved about the room exactly like a young man who has been discomfited by the necessity of sneezing before servants. Anywhere else in the world, of course, such a pose would not have been convincing. But your Brazilian not only adopts *fazenda fita* as his own avocation, but also suspects it to be everybody else's too. And a young Brazilian of the leisure class would be horribly annoyed at being

forced to so plebeian an exhibition in public.

He moved restlessly about the room, staring at the picture. Presently he blinked uncertainly and gazed about less definitely. He went rather uncertainly to the chair he had first occupied and sat down. He poured—or seemed to pour—another drink. Again he sneered, and looked mortified. He put down the glass with an air of finality. But he looked puzzledly about him. Then he sank back in his chair and gradually seemed to sink into a sort of apathetic indifference.

He looked, then, like a very bored young man on the verge of dozing off. But actually he was very much alert indeed. He had the feeling of eyes upon him for a while. Then that sensation ceased and he settled himself to wait. And meantime he felt a particular, peculiar gratitude to the late American consul at Puerto Pachecho for his interest in medicinal plants.

That gentleman had gone into the subject with the passionate enthusiasm of the amateur. He had described *icus*, *uirari* and *timbo*. He had particularized upon *makaka-nimbi* and *hervamoura*.

And he had gone into a wealth of detail concerning *yagué*, on account of its probable value if used in criminology. As consul at Puerto Pachecho he was not altogether a success in some ways, but he had invented an entirely original method of experimentation upon those drugs and poisons which did not require to be introduced into the bloodstream. His method was simplicity itself. An alcoholic solution "carried" a minute quantity of the drug in its vapor, just as an alcoholic solution carries a minute quantity of perfuming essential oil. He inhaled the odor of the alcoholic solution. The effect was immediately, strictly temporary, and not dangerous. He was enabled to describe the odors, in some cases the tastes, and in a few instances the effects of the substances he listed, from personal experience.

And Bell had used his method as an unpromising but possible test for a drug in the drink that had been brought him. He inhaled the strangling odor of the spilled liquor on his handkerchief. And there was a drug involved. For an instant he was dizzy, and for an instant he saw the room through a vivid blue haze.

And something clicked in his brain and said "It's *yagué*." And the relief of dealing with something which he knew—if only at second-hand—was so enormous that he felt almost weak.

Yagué, you see, is an extract from the leaves of a plant which is not yet included in *materia medica*. It has nearly the effect of scopolamine—once famous in connection with twilight sleep—and produces a daze of blue light, an intolerable sleepiness, and practically all the effects of hypnotism. A person under *yagué*, as under scopolamine or hypnosis, will seem to slumber and yet will obey any order, by whomever given. He will answer any question without reserve or any concealment. And on awakening he will remember nothing done under the influence of the potion. The effects are not particularly harmful.

Bell then, sat in an apparent half-daze, half-slumber, in the salon in which he waited for Ribiera to appear. He knew exactly what he was expected to do. Ribiera wanted to find out what he knew or suspected about Ortiz's death. Ribiera wanted to know many things, and he would believe what Bell told him because he

thought Bell had taken enough *yagué* to be practically an hypnotic subject. Let Ribiera believe what he was told!

When he came into the room, bland and smiling, Bell did not stir. He was literally crawling, inside, with an unspeakable repulsion to the man and the things for which he stood. But he seemed dazed and dull, and when Ribiera began to ask questions he babbled his answers in a toneless, flat voice. He babbled very satisfactorily, in Ribiera's view.

When Ribiera shook him roughly by the shoulder he started, and let his eyes clear. Ribiera was laughing heartily.

"Senhor! Senhor!" said Ribiera jovially. "My hospitality is at fault! You come to be my guest and I allow you to be so bored that you drop off to sleep! I was detained for five minutes and came in to find you slumbering!"

Bell stared ruefully about him and rubbed his eyes.

"I did, for a fact," he admitted apologetically. "I'm sorry. Up late last night, and I was tired. I dropped in to see those planes you suggested I'd be interested in. But I daresay it's late, now."

Ribiera chuckled again. He was in his late and corpulent forties and was something of a dandy. If one were captious, one might object to the thickness of his lips. They suggested sensuality. And there was a shade—a bare shade—more of pigment in his skin than the American passes altogether unquestioned. And his hair was wavy.... But he could be a charming host.

"We'll have a drink," he said bluntly, "while the car's coming around to the door, and then go out to the flying field."

"No drink," said Bell, lifting his hand. "I feel squeamish now. I say! Haven't you changed the lamps, or something? Everything looks blue...."

That was a lie. Things looked entirely normal to Bell. But he looked about him as if vaguely puzzled. If he

had drunk the liquor Ribiera had sent him, things would have had a bluish tinge for some time after. But as it was....

Ribiera chaffed him jovially on the way to the flying field. And introducing him to fliers and officials of the field, he told with gusto of Bell's falling asleep while waiting for him. A very jolly companion, Ribiera.

But Bell saw two or three men looking at him very queerly. Almost sympathetically. And he noticed, a little later, that a surprising number of fliers and officials of the airport seemed to be concealing an abject terror of Ribiera. One or two of them seemed to hate him as well.

CHAPTER 4

Bell stepped out of a tall French window to a terrace, and from the terrace to the ground. There was a dull muttering in the sky to the east, and a speck appeared, drew nearer swiftly, grew larger, and became a small army biplane. It descended steeply to earth behind a tall planting of trees. Bell lighted a cigarette and moved purposelessly down an

elaborately formalized garden.

"More victims," he observed grimly to himself, of the plane.

Ribiera lifted a pigmented hand to wave languidly from a shaded chair. There were women about him, three of them, and it sickened Bell to see the frightened assiduity with which they flattered him. Bell had met them, of course. Madame the wife of the State President of Bahia—in the United States of Brazil the states have presidents instead of governors—preferred the title of "Madame" because it was more foreign and consequently more aristocratic than Senhora. And Madame the wife of the General—

"Senhor," called Ribiera blandly, "I have news for you."

Bell turned and went toward him with an air of pleased expectancy. He noticed for the first time the third of the women. Young, in the first flush of youthful maturity, but with an expression of stark terror lingering behind a palpably assumed

animation.

"An acquaintance of yours, Senhor," said Ribiera, "is to be my guests."

Bell steeled himself.

"The Senhor Canalejas," said Ribiera, beaming, "and his daughter."

Bell seemed to frown, and then seemed to remember.

"Oh, yes," he said carelessly, "I met her in Washington. She was on the *Almirante Gomez*, coming down."

The next instant he saw Ribiera's expression, and cursed himself for a fool. Ribiera's eyes had narrowed sharply. Then they half-closed, and he smiled.

"She is charming," said Ribiera in drowsy contentment, "and I had thought you would be glad to improve her acquaintance. Especially since, as my friend, you may congratulate me. A contract of

marriage is under discussion."

Bell felt every muscle grow taut. The fat, pigmented man before him....

"Indeed," said Bell politely, "I do congratulate you."

Ribiera looked at him with an expression in which a sardonic admiration mingled with something else less pleasant.

"You are clever, Senhor Bell," he said heavily, seeming to sink more deeply into his chair. "Very clever." He shifted his eyes to the women who stood about him. "You may go," he said indifferently. His tone was exactly that of a despot dismissing his slaves. Two of them colored with instinctive resentment. His eyes lingered an instant on the third. Her face had showed only a passionate relief. "You, Senhora," he said heavily, "may wait nearby."

The terror returned to her features, but she moved submissively to a spot a little out of earshot. Bell found his jaws clenched. There is a certain racial taint

widespread in Brazil which leads to an intolerable arrogance when there is the slightest opportunity for its exercise. Ribiera had the taint, and Bell felt a sickening wrath at the terrified submission of the women.

"*Si*," said Ribiera, suddenly adverting to insolence. "You are clever, Senhor Bell. Where did you learn of *yagué*?"

Bell inhaled leisurely. His muscles were tense, but he gave no outward sign. Instead, he sat down comfortably upon the arm of a chair facing Ribiera's. The only way to meet insolence is with equal insolence and a greater calm.

"Ah!" said Bell pleasantly. "So you found out it didn't work, after all!"

Ribiera's eyes contracted. He became suddenly enraged.

"You are trifling with me," he said furiously. "Do you know the penalty for that?"

"Why, yes," said Bell, and smiled amiably. "A dose of—er—poison of The Master's private brand."

It was a guess, but based on a good deal of evidence. Ribiera turned crimson, then pale.

"What do you know?" he demanded in a deadly quietness. "You cannot leave this place. You are aware of that. The people here—guests and servants—are my slaves, the slaves of The Master. You cannot leave this place except also as my slave. I will have you bound and given *yagué* so that you cannot fail to tell me anything that I wish to know. I will have you tortured so that you will gladly say anything that I wish, in return for death. I will—"

"You will," said Bell dryly, "drop dead with seven bullets in your body if you give a signal for anyone to attack me."

Ribiera stared at him as his hand rested negligently in his coat pocket. And then, quite suddenly Ribiera began to chuckle. His rage vanished. He laughed, a monstrous, gross, cackling laughter.

"You have been my guest for two days," he gasped, slapping his fat knees, "and you have not noticed that your pistol has been tampered with! Senhor Bell! Senhor Bell! My uncle will be disappointed in you!"

It seemed to impress him as a victory that Bell had been depending upon an utterly futile threat for safety. It restored his good humor marvelously.

"It does not matter," he said jovially. "Presently you will tell me all that I wish to know. More, perhaps. My uncle is pleased with you. You recall your little talk with the wireless operator on the *Almirante Gomez*? You tried to learn things from him, Senhor. He reported it. Of course. All our slaves report. He sent his report to my uncle, The Master, and I did not have it until to-day. I will admit that you deceived me. I knew you had talked with Ortiz, who was a fool. I thought that in his despair he might have spoken. I gave you *yagué*, as I thought, and informed my uncle that you knew nothing. And he is very much pleased with you. It was clever to deceive me about the *yagué*. My uncle has high praise for you. He has told me that he desires your services."

Bell inhaled again. There was no question but that Ribiera was totally unafraid of the threat he had made. His gun must have been tampered with, the firing-pin filed off perhaps. So Bell said placidly:

"Well? He desires my services?"

Ribiera chuckled, in his gross and horrible good humor.

"He will have them. Senhor. He will have them. When you observe your hands writhing at the ends of your wrists, you will enter his service, through me. Of course. And he will reward you richly. Money, much money, such as I have. And slaves—such as I have. The Senhora...."

Ribiera looked at the terrified girl standing thirty or forty feet away. He chuckled again.

"My uncle desires that you should be induced to enter his service of your own will. So, Senhor, you shall see first what my uncle's service offers. And later, when you know what pleasures you may some day possess

as my uncle's deputy in your own nation, why, then the fact that your hands are writhing at the ends of your wrists will be merely an added inducement to come to me. And I bear you no ill will for deceiving me. You may go."

Bell rose.

"And still," he said dryly, "I suspect that you are deceived. But now you deceive yourself."

He heard Ribiera chuckling as he walked away. He heard him call, amusedly, "Senhora." He heard the little gasp of terror with which the girl obeyed. He passed her, stumbling toward the gross fat man with the light brown skin and curly hair. Her eyes were literally pools of anguish.

Bell threw away his cigarette and began to fumble for another. He was beginning to feel the first twinges of panic, and fought them down. Ribiera had not lied. Bell had been at this *fazenda* of his—which was almost a miniature Versailles three hundred miles from Rio—for two days. In all that time he had not

seen one person besides himself who did not display the most abject terror of Ribiera. Ribiera had made no idle boast when he said that everyone about, guests and servants, were slaves. They were. Slaves of a terror vastly greater than mere fear of death. It—

"Senhor!... *Oh, Dios!*" It was the girl's voice, in despair.

Ribiera laughed. Bell felt a red mist come before his eyes.

He deliberately steadied his hands and lighted his cigarette. He heard stumbling footsteps coming behind him. A hand touched his arm. He turned to see the girl Ribiera had pointed out, her cheeks utterly, chalky white, trying desperately to smile.

"Senhor!" she gasped. "Smile at me! For the love of God, smile at me!"

In the fraction of a second, Bell was mad with rage. He understood, and he hated Ribiera with a corrosive hatred past conception. And then he was deathly

calm, and wholly detached, and he smiled widely, and turned and looked at Ribiera, and Ribiera's whole gross bulk quivered as he chuckled. Bell took the girl's arm with an excessive politeness and managed—he never afterward understood how he managed it—to grin at Ribiera.

"Senhora," he said in a low tone, "I think I understand. Stop being afraid. We can fool him. Come and walk with me and talk. The idea is that he must think you are trying to fascinate me, is it not?"

She spoke through stiffened lips.

"Ah, that I could die!"

Bell had a horrible part to play while he walked the length of the formal garden with her, and found a pathway leading out of it, and led her out of sight. He stopped.

"Now," he said sharply, "tell me. I am not yet his slave. He has ordered you...."

She was staring before her with wide eyes that saw only despair.

"I—I am to persuade you to be my lover," she said dully, "or I shall know the full wrath of The Master...."

Bell asked questions, crisply, but as gently as he could.

"We are his slaves," she told him apathetically. "I and *mi Arturo*—my husband. Both of us...." She roused herself little under Bell's insistent questioning. "We were guests at his house at dinner. Our friends, people high in society and in the Republic, were all about us. We suspected nothing. We had heard nothing. But two weeks later Arturo became irritable. He said that he saw red spots before his eyes. I also. Then Arturo's hands writhed at the ends of his wrists. He could not control them. His nerves were horrible. And mine. And we—we have a tiny baby.... And Senhor Ribiera called upon my husband. He was charming. He observed my husband's hands. He had a remedy, he said. He gave it to my husband. He became normal again. And then—my hands writhed.

Senhor Ribiera told my husband that if he would bring me to him.... And I was relieved. We were grateful. We accepted the invitation of the Senhor Ribiera to this place. And he showed us a man, in chains. He—he went mad before our eyes. He was a member of the United States Secret Service.... And then the Senhor Ribiera told us that we faced the same fate if we did not serve him...."

Bell had thrust aside rage as useless, now. He was deliberately cold.

"And so?"

"It is a poison," she said unsteadily. "A deadly, a horrible poison which drives men murder mad in two weeks from the time of its administration. The Senhor Ribiera has an antidote for it. But mixed with the antidote, which acts at once, is more of the horrible poison, which will act in two weeks more. So that we are entrapped. If we disobey him...."

Bell began to smile slowly, and not at all mirthfully.

"I think," he said softly, "that I shall gain a great deal of pleasure from killing the Senhor Ribiera."

"*Dios—*" She strangled upon the word. "Do you not see, Senhor, that if he dies we—we—" She stopped and choked. "We—have a tiny baby, Senhor. We—we would...."

Again sick rage surged up in Bell. To kill Ribiera meant to drive his slaves mad, and mad in the most horrible fashion that can be imagined. To kill Ribiera meant to have these people duplicate the death of Ortiz, as their greatest hope, or to fill madhouses with snarling animals lusting to kill....

"It is—it is not only I, Senhor," said the girl before him. She was utterly listless, and in the agony of despair. "It is Arturo, also. The Senhor Ribiera has said that if I do not persuade you, that both Arturo and I.... And our little baby, Senhor!... Our families also will be entrapped some day. He has said so.... He will give that poison to our baby.... And it will grow up either his slave, or—"

Her eyes were pools of panic.

"Oh, God!" said Bell very quietly. "And he's offering me this power! He's trying to persuade me to become like him. He's offering me pleasures!"

He laughed unpleasantly. And then he went sick with helplessness. He could kill Ribiera, perhaps, and let only God know how many people go mad. Perhaps. Or perhaps Ribiera would merely be supplanted by another man. Ortiz had said that he killed The Master's deputy in Buenos Aires, but that another man had taken his place. And the thing went on. And The Master desired a deputy in the United States....

"Somehow," said Bell very softly, "this has got to be stopped. Somehow. Right away. That devilish stuff! Can you get hold of a bit of the antidote?" he asked abruptly. "The merest drop of it?"

She shook her head.

"No, Senhor. It is given in food, in wine. One never knows that one has had it. It is tasteless, and we have

only Senhor Ribiera's word that it has been given."

Bell's hands clenched.

"So devilish clever.... What are we going to do?"

The girl stuffed the corner of her handkerchief into her mouth.

"I am thinking of my little baby," she said, choking. "I must persuade you, Senhor. I—I have been tearful. I—I am not attractive. I will try. If I am not attractive to you...."

Bell cursed, deeply and savagely. It seemed to be the only possible thing to do. And then he spoke coldly.

"Listen to me, Senhora. Ribiera talked frankly to me just now. He knows that so far I am not subdued. If I escape he cannot blame you. He cannot! And I am going to attempt it. If you will follow me...."

"There is no escape for me," she said dully, "and if he thinks that I knew of your escape and did not tell

him...."

"Follow me," said Bell, smiling queerly. "I shall take care that he does not suspect it."

He gazed about for an instant, orienting himself. The plane that had just landed—the last of a dozen or more that had arrived in the past two days—had dipped down on the private landing field to the north.

There was a beautifully kept way running from the landing field to the house, and he went on through the thick shrubbery amid a labyrinth of paths, choosing the turnings most likely to lead him to it.

He came out upon it suddenly, and faced toward the field. There were two men coming toward the house, on foot. One was a flying pilot, still in his flying clothes. The other was a tall man, for a Brazilian, with the lucent clarity of complexion that bespeaks uncontaminated white descent. He was white-haired, and his face was queerly tired, as if he were exhausted.

Bell looked sharply. He seemed to see a resemblance to someone he knew in the tall man. He spoke quickly to the girl beside him.

"Who is the man to the left?"

"Senhor Canalejas," said the girl drearily. "He is the Minister of War. I suppose he, too...."

Bell drew a deep breath. He walked on, confidently. As the two others drew near he said apologetically:

"Senhores."

They halted with the instinctive, at least surface, courtesy of the Brazilian. And Bell was fumbling with his handkerchief, rather nervously tying a knot in it. He held it out to Canalejas.

"Observe."

It was, of course, a recognition-knot such as may be given to an outsider by one in the Trade. The tall man's face changed. And Bell swung swiftly and

suddenly and very accurately to the point of the other man's jaw.

He collapsed.

"Senhor Canalejas," said Bell politely, "I am about to go and steal an airplane to take what I have learned to my companion for transmission. If you wish to go with me...."

Canalejas stared for the fraction of a second. Then he said quietly:

"But of course."

He turned to retrace his steps. Bell turned to the girl.

"If you are wise," he said gently, "you will go and give the alarm. If you are kind, you will delay it as much as you dare."

She regarded him in agonized doubt for a moment, and nodded. She fled.

"Now," said Bell casually, "I think we had better hasten. And I hope, Senhor Canalejas, that you have a revolver. We will need one. Mine has been ruined."

Without a word, the white-haired man drew out a weapon and offered it to him.

"I had intended," he said very calmly, "to kill the Senhor Ribiera. His last demand is for my daughter."

They went swiftly. The plane Bell had seen alight some fifteen or twenty minutes before was just being approached by languid mechanics. It was, of course, still warm. Canalejas shouted and waved his arm imperiously. It is probable that he gave the impression of a man returning for some forgotten thing, left in the cockpit of the plane.

What happened then, happened quickly. A few crisp words in a low tone. A minor hubbub began suddenly back at the house. Canalejas climbed into the passenger's seat as if looking for something. And Bell presented his now useless automatic pleasantly at the head of the nearest staring mechanic, and while he

froze in horror, scrambled up into the pilot's cockpit.

"Contact!" he snapped, and turned on the switch. The mechanic remained frozen with fear. "Damnation!" said Bell savagely. "I don't know the Portuguese for 'Turn her over'!"

He fumbled desperately about in the cockpit. Something whirred. The propeller went over.... Canalejas shot with painstaking accuracy, twice. The motor caught with a spluttering roar.

As a horde of running figures, servants and guests, running with the same desperation, came plunging out on the flying field from the shrubbery. Bell gave the motor the gun. The fast little plane's tail came up off the ground as she darted forward. Faster and faster, with many bumpings. The bumpings ceased. She was clear.

And Bell zoomed suddenly to lift her over the racing, fear-ridden creatures who clutched desperately at the wheels, and then the little ship shot ahead, barely cleared the trees to the east of the field, and began to

roar at her topmost speed toward Rio.

CHAPTER 5

The Trade—which does not exist—has its obligations and its code, but also it has its redeeming features. When a man has finished his job, he has finished it. And as far as the Trade was concerned, Bell had but little more to do. But after that—and his eyes burned smokily in their depths—there was much that he intended to do. He sat in one of the *bondes* of the Botanical Garden half of the street railway system of Rio, and absent mindedly regarded the scenery. This particular *bonde* was headed out toward the Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas, by which salty mass of water Bell would meet Paula Canalejas. He would receive a package from her, which he would deliver to Jamison. And then he would be free, and it was his private intention to engage in an enterprise which was very probably a form of suicide. But there are some things one cannot dismiss with a sage reflection that they are not one's business. This matter of Ribiera was definitely one of them.

The escape from Ribiera's *fazenda* had been relatively easy, because so thoroughly unexpected. The little plane had climbed to five thousand feet and found a stratum of cloud that stretched for very many miles. Bell had emerged from it only twice in the first hour of flight, and the second time the sky was clear all about him. That he was pursued, he had no doubt. That Ribiera had wireless communications with Rio, he knew. And he knew that instant, and imperative orders would have gone out for his capture.

Rio would not be a healthy place for him. If Ribiera had power over high government officials, he had surely indirect power over the police, and a search for Bell would be in order at once. Yet Canalejas assuredly expected to return to Rio.

A shouted question with the motor cut out, and a nodded answer. Bell headed for Petropolis, which is Rio's only real summer resort and is high in the hills and only an hour and a half from it by train. It was surprisingly satisfactory to be handling a swift plane again, and Bell allowed himself what he knew was about the only pleasure he was likely to have for some

time to come.

Something of his hatred of Ribiera, however, came back as he prepared to land. He managed to crack the plane up very neatly, so that it would be of no use to Ribiera any more. And at the same time, of course, the cracking-up provided an excellent excuse for Canalejas to continue on by train.

They talked very briefly by the puffing engine.

"It is best," said Canalejas, "for you, Senhor, to remain here overnight. I believe Senhor Ribiera has given orders for us both to be looked for, yet as a Cabinet Minister I am still immune from arrest by the ordinary police. If I reach my home I shall be able to do all that is necessary."

"And you will prepare a message for me to carry," said Bell.

"It is ready," said Canalejas. He smiled faintly. "No, Senhor. I have instructions to give my daughter. She will deliver the information to you to-morrow. Let me

see. At the edge of the Lagao Rodrigo de Feitas, at nine o'clock. She is the only messenger I can trust. I think that is all."

Bell hesitated uncomfortably.

"But you, sir," he said awkwardly. "You have been poisoned, as Senor Ortiz was."

"But certainly," said Canalejas. His smile was ironic as before. "But, unlike Senor Ortiz, I have no hope. I have arranged for my daughter to conceal herself and escape from Brazil. I have prepared for everything, Senhor. As you know, I had intended to kill Senhor Ribiera. In returning with you I have merely delayed my own death by a few hours."

Still smiling, and with the air of one entering a train for the most casual of journeys, Canalejas entered the coach.

And Bell, sitting in the *bonde* next morning, saw with an uncanny clarity the one weak point in Ribiera's hold upon his subjects. When they had courage to

fear nothing more than death, they could defy him. And not many could attain to that courage. But a few....

"I'll have some help, anyway," muttered Bell savagely to himself.

It is a long ride to the Botanical Gardens, from which one half the surface lines of Rio take their name. On the way out to the Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas, which, is close by the Garden itself, Bell had time to work over for the thousandth time the information he possessed, and realize its uselessness. Two things, only, might be of service. One was that Ribiera was the nephew of the person referred to as The Master, and yet was evidently as much subjected to him as his own victims to himself. The other was that the ultimate end of all the ghastly scheme was in some fashion political. If wealth alone had been Ribiera's aim, the gathering of his slaves would have had a different aspect. The majority of them would have been rich men, men of business, men who could pay out hundreds of thousands a month in the desperate hope of being permitted to remain sane. There would not have been

politicians and officials and officers of the army.

"The key men of the country," growled Bell inaudibly, "enslaved to Ribiera. They give him the power he's after more than cash. And it's those key men who have more to lose than money. There's such a thing as honor...."

Three times the conductor stopped beside him and suggestively rattled the coins in his box. Three times Bell absent mindedly paid the fare for the zone. But the ride is a long one, and he had had time to realize the hopelessness of any single-handed attack upon the thing he faced long before the end.

Then he absently moved through the amazing collection of tropic and near tropic growths that is the Botanical Garden until he came at once to Paula and the Lagoa Rodrico de Freitas.

It was alive with birds, and they hopped and pecked and squabbled without acrimony within feet of her seated figure. Bell knew that she had been waiting for a long time. He looked quickly at her face. It was

quite pale, but entirely tearless.

"Here is the message, Senhor Bell," she said quietly, "but I think I have been followed."

Bell growled in his throat.

"I did not discover it until I reached this spot," she said evenly. "And I did not know what to do. If I left, I would be seized and the message taken—and I think that someone would have waited here for you. So, in part to gain time, and in part because I hoped you might have some resource, I remained."

"How many of them?" asked Bell shortly.

"Two," she said quietly. She looked at him, her large eyes entirely calm and grave.

"Give me the package," said Bell briefly. "They'll be more anxious to get it back than to bother you. And I'll either knock them cold or hold them in a scrap until you get away."

She reached in her pocket and handed him a small thick envelope. He stuffed it in the side pocket of his coat.

"I will walk away," he observed, "and they'll follow me. Can you arrange to give me some sign that you're safe?"

"By the gateway," she told him. "My handkerchief. I shall start as soon as you have vanished. If I am followed, I will drop this handkerchief, as it is. If I am not followed, I will tie a knot. But what can you do?"

"I'll do something," said Bell coldly. "Something!"

She smiled, with the same odd bitterness her father had shown.

"My father—shot himself," she said briefly. "I have no particular hope of doing better. But I shall not be Ribiera's slave."

She remained quite still. Bell moved away. He hurried. There was thick jungle ahead, a section of

the Gardens that is painstakingly preserved untouched and undisturbed, that visitors to the capital of Brazil may observe a typical sample of the virgin interior. He dived into that jungle as if in flight.

And very shortly after, two men dived in after him. They hesitated, these men, because your policeman of Rio does not like to injure his uniform, and there are many thorns in jungle growths. But they entered it, having first drawn small glittering weapons. And then from the jungle came silence.

It seemed to be silence. But there may have been some small unusual noises. It would not be easy to tell if they were unusual or not, because there are peculiar flashes of charm in certain Brazilian institutions. The preservation of the spot of jungle itself is one. Another is the fact that in the Gardens all manner of wild things live at large and provide unexpected and delightful surprises to the usually foreign visitors.

So there were noises, after a bit. Such noises as some grunting wild thing might have made, perhaps. But

they might also have been the gasping of a man as breath was choked out of him.... And there was a cracking sound a little later, which might—of course—have been any one of any number of accidental and perfectly natural causes. And it might have been a man upon whom another man had hurled himself, when the second man landed on his jaw. And thrashing noises a little later might have been anything.

But after what seemed a long time, Bell emerged. Alone. He was breathing quickly, and there were scratches on his face and hands which—well, which might have been made by thorns. He went swiftly back toward the spot where Paula had waited. He looked cautiously. She was gone.

And then Bell went leisurely, in the studious fashion of a person going through the Botanical Gardens because it was the thing to do, toward the gateway and the surface cars. As he neared the gate his eyes roved with apparent casualness all about. He saw a tiny speck of white on the edge of the roadway. It looked as if it had been flung from a car. Bell picked it

up. It was Paula's handkerchief, and there was no knot whatever in it. In fact, its lacy edge was torn.

"They've got her," said Bell, apparently unmoved.

He waited for a car. A bulky figure wearing thick spectacles came placidly from the Gardens. It waited, also, for the car. The car arrived, in its two sections of first and second class; the first reserved for *cavalhieros*, which is to say persons wearing coat, shirt, collar, necktie, hat, shoes and socks, and carrying no parcel larger than a brief case. Lesser folk who lacked any of the sartorial requirements for admission to the first class section, or wore *tomancos* instead of shoes, heaped themselves into the second section and paid one-third of the fare in the first.

Bell took his seat in the first section. It was comfortably filled. The bulky person with the thick spectacles wedged himself carefully into the space beside Bell. He unfolded a copy of the *Jornal do Commercio* and began to regard the advertisements. Presently he found what he was looking for. "*O Bicho*," said medium-sized type. Beside it was a

picture of a kangaroo. The gentleman with the thick spectacles resignedly fished into his pockets and found a lottery ticket. He tore it into scraps and threw them away. Then he began to gaze disinterestedly at the scenery and the other passengers in the car.

Bell drummed on his knee. With one's forefinger representing a dot, and one's second finger serving as a dash, it is surprising how naturally and absentmindedly one may convey a perfectly intelligible message to a man sitting within a reasonable distance. When the man is alongside, the matter is absurdly simple.

Presently the man with the thick lenses got out his paper again, as if bored by vistas such as no other city in the world can offer. His paper was in the pocket which pressed against Bell. If in getting out his newspaper he also abstracted a thick fat envelope from Bell's pocket and placed it in his own, and if all this took place under a sign—even in the section reserved for *cavalheiros* of approved raiment—solemnly warning passengers against "*batadores de carteiras*," or pickpockets—well, it was an ironical

coincidence whose humor Bell did not see.

He was busily tapping out on his knee the briefest possible account of what he had learned at Ribiera's *fazenda* up country.

"One chance for me," he tapped off at the end. *"If I can kidnap Ribiera I can make him talk. Somehow. He has big amphibian plane kept fueled and ready for long trip. I think he is back in Rio to direct hunt for me. Paula kidnapped. My job finished. On my own now."*

The man with thick spectacles did not nod. He seemed to be looking idly at his paper, but it was folded at an article very discreetly phrased, beneath a photograph of Senhor Teixeira Canalejas, Minister of War, who had very unfortunately been found dead that morning. He had been depressed, of late, but there were certain circumstances which made it as yet impossible to determine whether he had killed himself or was the victim of an assassin.

"Getting set for me," tapped Bell grimly on his knee.

"Ribiera told me too much."

The man with thick spectacles yawned and turned the paper over. Under a smaller headline—which would only find a place on a Brazilian sheet—"A Regrettable Incident"—an item of more direct importance was printed. It told of an unnamed Senhor from the United States of the North America, who as the guest of a widely known Brazilian gentleman had behaved most boorishly, had stolen an airplane from his host and broken it to bits on landing unskilfully, and had vanished with priceless heirlooms belonging to his host. It read, virtuously:

No names are mentioned because the American Senhor has been widely introduced in Rio society as a person with an official status in Washington. It is understood that an inquiry is to be made of the Ambassador as to the status of the young man, before any action is taken by the police. It is to be expected, however, that he will at least be requested to leave the country.

Bell managed the barest flicker of a smile. Arrest, of

course. Detention, most courteously arranged, while the Ambassador was communicated with. And Ribiera.

"*Give me dismiss,*" he tapped on his knee.

The gentleman in the thick spectacles ran his finger thoughtfully about the edge of his collar. In the Trade that is a signal of many varied meanings. A hand across the throat in any fashion means, "Clear out, your job is finished," "Save your skin as best you can," and "Get away without trying to help me," according to circumstances. In this case it relieved Bell of all future responsibility.

He yawned, tapping his lips with the back of his hand, signaled for a stop of the car, and got out. Five minutes later he had signaled a taxicab and given Ribiera's address. In six minutes he was being whirled toward the one house in all Rio de Janeiro from which his chance of a safe departure was slightest. In little more than half an hour he had dismissed the cab and was gazing placidly into the startled eyes of the doorman. The doorman, like all of

Rio where Ribiera was known and feared, knew that Bell was being hunted.

Bell handed over his card with an inscrutable air.

"The Senhor Ribiera," he said drily, "returned to the city last night. Present my card and say that I would like to speak to him."

The doorman ushered him inside and summoned the major-domo, still blinking his amazement. And the major-domo blinked again. But Bell followed with the air of an habitu  , as he was again ushered into the luxurious salon in which he had once been offered a drugged drink.

Again he sank down in a softly padded chair and surveyed the pictures and the minor objects of decadent art about him. Again he lighted a cigarette with every appearance of ease, and again had the impression of eyes upon him. The major-domo appeared, somewhat agitated.

"The Senhor Ribiera," he said harshly, "will see you

only if you are not armed. He requires your word of honor."

Bell smiled lazily.

"I'll do better than that," he said languidly. "I haven't had time to buy a revolver. But the automatic he had put out of commission is in my pocket. Present it to him with my compliments."

He handed over the weapon, butt first. The major-domo blinked, and took it. Bell sat down and smiled widely. He had been expected to be uproarious, to attempt to force the major-domo to lead him to Ribiera. And, of course, he would have been led past a perfectly planned ambush for his capture—but he might have killed the major-domo. Which would not disturb Ribiera, but had disturbed the servant.

Bell smoked comfortably. And suddenly hangings parted, and Ribiera came into the room. He smiled nervously, and then, as Bell blew a puff of smoke at him and nodded casually, he scowled.

"I came," said Bell deliberately, "to make a bargain. Frankly, I do not like to break my word. I was under obligations to deliver a package from Senhor Canalejas to a certain messenger who will take it to my government. I have done it. But I am not, Senhor Ribiera, a member of the Secret Service. I am entirely a free agent now, and I am prepared to consider your proposals, which I could not in honor do before."

He smiled pleasantly. Effrontery, properly managed, is one of the most valuable of all qualities. Especially in dealing with people who themselves are arrogant when they dare.

Ribiera purpled with rage, and then controlled it.

"Ah!" he rumbled. "You are prepared to consider my proposals. There are no proposals. The Master may be amused at your cleverness in escaping. I do not know. I do know that I am ordered to make you my slave and send you to The Master. That, I shall do."

"Perhaps," said Bell blandly: "but I can go without food and drink for several days, which will delay the

process. And while I cannot honorably tell you how to stop the man bearing Senhor Canalejas' package to my government, still ... If I willingly accepted a dose of *yagué* in token of my loyalty to The Master...."

Ribiera's good humor returned. He chuckled.

"You actually mean," he said jovially, "that you think you were given some of The Master's little compound, and that you wish to make terms before your hands begin to writhe at the ends of your wrists. Is not that your reason?"

Bell's eyes flickered. He had been horribly afraid of just that. But Ribiera's amusement was reassuring.

"Perhaps," said Bell. "Perhaps I am."

Ribiera sat down and stretched his fat legs in front of him. He surveyed Bell with an obscene, horrible amusement.

"Ah, Senhor," he chuckled, "some day we will laugh together over this! You yet hope, and do not yet know

how much better it will be for you if you cease to hope, and cultivate desires! The Master is pleased with you. You have just those qualities he knows are necessary in dealing with your nation. He is not angry with you. It is his intention to use you to extend his—ah—influence among the officials of your nation. You know, of course, that in but a little more time I will hold all Brazil—as I now hold this city—in the hollow of my hand. Four of the republics of this continent are already completely under the control of The Master's deputies, and of the rest, Brazil is not the most nearly subdued. A year or two, and The Master will become Emperor, and his deputies viceroys. And it is his whim to give you the opportunity of becoming the first deputy and the first viceroy of North America. And you come to me and offer—you, Senhor!—to make terms! I believe even The Master will laugh when he hears of it."

"But," said Bell practically, "do you accept my terms?"

Ribiera chuckled again.

"What are they, Senhor?"

"That you release the daughter of the Senhor Canalejas and pledge your word of honor that she will not be enslaved."

Ribiera's word of honor, of course, would be worth rather less than the breath that was used to give it. But his reception of the proposal would be informative.

He chuckled again.

"No, Senhor. I do not accept. But I will promise you as a favor, because my uncle The Master admires you, that within a few weeks you shall enjoy her charms. I do not," he added with amused candor, "find that any one woman diverts me for a very long time."

"Oh," said Bell, very quietly.

He sat still for an instant, and then shrugged, and looked about as if for an ash tray in which to knock the ashes from his cigarette. He stood up, carrying the tube of tobacco gingerly, and moved toward one by Ribiera's elbow. He knocked off the ash, and

crushed out the tiny coal. He fumbled in his pockets.

The next instant Ribiera choked with terror.

"Let me explain," said Bell softly. "I did not give your major-domo my word that I was unarmed. I merely gave him a weapon. I got these from two policemen who tried to arrest me an hour or so ago. And I also remind you, Senhor, that if the armed men you have posted to prevent my escape try to shoot me, that the inevitable contraction of my muscles will send two bullets into your heart—even if I am dead. I am a dead man, Senhor, if you give the word, but so are you if you give it."

Ribiera gasped. His eyes rolled in his head.

"Send for her," said Bell very gently. "Send for her, Senhor. I estimate that she has been in this house for less than half an hour. Have her brought here at once, and if she has been harmed the three of us will perish very promptly, and half of Rio will go mad after our death."

And the muzzles of two revolvers bored into the fat flesh of Ribiera's body, and a gasp that was almost a wail of terror came from the watchers—armed watchers—who dared not kill the man they had been posted to guard Ribiera against.

Ribiera lifted his hand and croaked an order.

In this room the electric lights were necessary at all times. And it occurred to Bell irrelevantly that perhaps there were no windows because there might be sometimes rather noisy scenes within these walls. And windows will convey the sound of screaming to the outside air, while solid walls will not.

He stood alert and grim, with his revolvers pressing into Ribiera's flabby flesh. His fingers were tensed upon the triggers. If he killed Ribiera, he would be killed. Of course. And men and women he had known and liked might be doomed to the most horrible of fates by Ribiera's death. Yet even the death or madness of many men was preferable to the success of the conspiracy in which Ribiera seemed to figure largely.

Ribiera looked up at him with the eyes of a terrified snake. There was a little stirring at the door.

"Your friends," said Bell softly, "had better not come close."

Ribiera gasped an order. The stirrings stopped. Paula came slowly into the room quite alone. She smiled queerly at Bell.

"I believed that you would come," she said quietly. "And yet I do not know that we can escape."

"We're going to try," said Bell grimly. To Ribiera he added curtly, "You'd better order the path cleared to the door, and have one of your cars brought around."

Ribiera croaked a repetition of the command.

"Now stand up—slowly," said Bell evenly. "Very slowly. I don't want to die, Ribiera, so I don't want to kill you. But I haven't much hope of escape, so I shan't hesitate very long about doing it. And I've got these guns' hammers trembling at full cock. If I get a bullet

through my head, they'll go off just the same and kill you."

Ribiera got up. Slowly. His face was a pasty gray.

"Your major-domo," Bell told him matter-of-factly, "will go before us and open every door on both sides of the way to the street. Paula"—he used her given name without thought, or without realizing it—"Paula will go and look into each door. If she as much as looks frightened, I fire, and try to fight the rest of the way clear. Understand? I'm going to get down to a boat I have ready in the harbor if I have to kill you and every living soul in the house!"

There was no boat in the harbor, naturally. But the major-domo moved hesitantly across the room, looking at his master for orders. For Ribiera to die meant death or madness to his slaves. The major-domo's face was ghastly with fear. He moved onward, and Bell heard the sound of doors being thrust wide. Once he gave a command in the staccato fashion of a terrified man. Bell nodded grimly.

"Now we'll move. Slowly, Ribiera! Always slowly.... Ah! That's better! Paula, you go on before and look into each room. I shall be sorry if any of your servants follow after you, Ribiera.... Through the doorway. Yes! All clear, Paula? I'm balancing the hammers very carefully, Ribiera. Very delicate work. It is fortunate for you that my nerves are rather steady. But really, I don't much care.... Still all clear before us, Paula? With the servants nerve-racked as they are, I believe we'll make it through, even if I do kill Ribiera. There'll be no particular point in killing us then. It won't help them. Don't stumble, please, Ribiera.... Go carefully, and very slowly...."

Ribiera's face was a gray mask of terror when they reached the door. A long, low car with two men on the chauffeur's seat was waiting.

"Only one man up front, Ribiera," said Bell dryly. "No ostentation, please. Now, I hope your servants haven't summoned the police, because they might want to stop me from marching you out there with a gun in the small of your back. And that would be deplorable, Ribiera. Quite deplorable."

With a glance, he ordered Paula into the tonneau. He followed her, driving Ribiera before him. There seemed to be none about but the stricken, terrified servant who had opened the door for their exit.

"My friend," Bell told the major-domo grimly, "I'll give you a bit of comfort. I'm not going to try to take the Senhor Ribiera away with me. Once I'm on board the yacht that waits for me, I'll release him so he can keep you poor devils sane until my Government has found a way to beat this devilish poison of his. Then I'll come back and kill him. Now you can tell the chauffeur to drive us to the Biera Mar."

He settled back in his seat. There were beads of perspiration on his forehead, but he could not wipe them off. He held the two revolvers against Ribiera's flabby body.

The car turned the corner, and he added dryly:

"Your servants, Ribiera, will warn your more prominent slaves of my intention of going on board a yacht. Preparations will be made to stop every

pleasure boat and search it for me. So ... tell your chauffeur to swing about and make for the flying field. And tell him to drive carefully, by the way. I've still got these guns on a very fine adjustment of the trigger-pressure."

Ribiera croaked the order. Bell was exactly savage enough to kill him if he did not escape.

For twenty minutes the car sped through the residential districts of Rio. The sun was high in the air, but clouds were banking up above the Pao d'Assucar—the Sugarloaf—and it looked as if there might be one of the sudden summer thunderstorms that sometimes sweep Rio.

Then the clear road to the flying field. Rio has the largest metropolitan district in the world, but a great deal of it is piled on end, and Rio itself built on most of the rest. The flying field is necessarily some miles from even the residential districts, for the sake of a level plain of sufficient area.

The car shot ahead through practically untouched

jungle, interspersed with tiny clearings in which were patchwork houses that might have been a thousand miles in the interior instead of so near the center of all civilization in Brazil. Up smooth gradients. Around beautifully engineered curves.

Bell put aside one revolver long enough to search Ribiera carefully. He found a pearl-handled automatic, and handed it to Paula.

"Worth having," he said cheerfully. "I wonder if you'd mind searching the chauffeur: with that gun at his head I think he'd be peaceful. You needn't have him stop."

Paula stood up, smiling a little.

"I did not think I lacked courage, Senhor," she observed, "but you have taught me more."

"*Nil desperandum*," said Bell lightly. He relaxed deliberately. Matters would be tense at the flying field, and he would need to be wholly calm. There was little danger of an attempt at rescue here, and the

necessity of being ready to shoot Ribiera at any instant was no longer a matter of split seconds.

He watched, while, bent over the back of the front seat, she extracted two squat weapons from the chauffeur's pockets.

"Quite an arsenal," said Bell as he pocketed them. He turned pleasantly to Ribiera. "Now, Ribiera, you understand just what I want. That big amphibian plane of yours is fairly fast, and once when I was merely your guest you assured me that it was always kept fueled and even provisioned for a long flight. When we reach the flying field I want it rolled out and warmed up, over at the other end of the field from the flying line. We'll go over to it in the car.

"And I've thought of something. It worried me, before, because sometimes if a man's shot he merely relaxes all over. So while we're at the flying field I'm going to be holding back the triggers of these guns with my thumbs. I don't have to pull the trigger at all—just let go and they'll go off. It isn't so fine an adjustment as I had just now, but it's safer for you as long as you

behave. And you might urge your chauffeur to be cautious. I do hope, Ribiera, that you won't look as if you were frightened. If there's any hitch, and delay for letting some fuel out of the tanks or messing up the motors, I'll be very sorry for you."

The car swooped out into bright sunshine. The flying field lay below, already in the shadow of the banking clouds above. Hangars lay stretched out across the level space.

Through the gates. Ribiera licked his lips. Bell jammed the revolver muzzles closer against his sides. The chauffeur halted the car. Paula spoke softly to him. He stiffened. Bell found it possible to smile faintly.

Ribiera gave orders. There was a moment's pause—the revolver muzzles went deeper into his side—and he snarled a repetition. The official cringed and moved swiftly.

"You have chosen your slaves well, Ribiera," said Bell coolly. "They seem to occupy all strategic positions.

We'll ride across."

The gears clashed. The car swerved forward and went deliberately across the wide clear space that was the flying field. It halted near the farther side. In minutes the door of a hangar swung wide. There was the sputtering of a not-yet-warmed-up motor. The big plane came slowly out, its motors coughing now and then. It swung clumsily across the field, turned in a wide circle, and stopped some forty or fifty feet from the car.

"Send the mechanic back, on foot," said Bell softly.

Again Ribiera found it expedient to snarl. And Bell added, gently, while the throttled-down motors of the big amphibian boomed on:

"Now get out of the car."

Tiny figures began to gaze curiously at them from the row of hangars. The mechanic, starting back on foot, the four people getting out of the car, the big plane waiting....

With his revolver ready and aimed at Ribiera's bulk, Bell reached in the front of the car and turned off the switch. The motor died abruptly. He put the key in his pocket.

"Just to get a minute or two extra start," he said dryly. "Climb up in the plane, Paula."

She obeyed, and turned at the top.

"I will cover them until you are up," she said quietly.

Bell laughed, now. A genuine laugh, for the first time in many days.

"We do work together!" he said cheerfully.

But he backed up the ladder. There was a stirring over by the hangars. The mechanic who had taxied the plane to this spot was a dwindling speck, no more than a third of the way across the field. But even from the distant hangars it could be seen that something was wrong.

"Close the door, Paula," said Bell. He had seated himself at the controls, and scanned the instruments closely.

This machine was heavy and large and massive. The boat-body between the retractable wheels added weight to the structure, and when Bell gave it the gun it seemed to pick up speed with an irritating slowness, and to roll and lurch very heavily when it did begin to approach flying speed. The run was long before the tail came up. It was longer before the joltings lessened and the plane began to rise slowly, with the solid steadiness that only a large and heavily loaded plane can compass.

Up, and up.... Bell was three hundred feet high when he crossed the hangars and saw tiny faces staring up at him. Some of the small figures were pointing across the field. The big plane circled widely, gaining altitude, and Bell gazed down. Ribiera was gesticulating wildly, pointing upward to the soaring thing, shaking his fist at it, and making imperious, frantic motions of command.

Bell took one quick glance all about the horizon. Toward the sea the sun shone down brilliantly upon the city. Inland a broad white wall of advancing rain moved toward the coastline. And Bell smiled frostily, and flung the big ship into a dive and swooped down upon Ribiera as a hawk might swoop at a chicken.

Ribiera saw the monster thing bearing down savagely, its motors bellowing, its nose pointed directly at him. And there is absolutely nothing more terrifying upon the earth than to see a plane diving upon you with deadly intent. A panic that throws back to non-human ancestors seizes upon a man. He feels the paralysis of those ancient anthropoids who were preyed upon by dying races of winged monsters in the past. That racial, atavistic terror seizes upon him.

Bell laughed, though it sounded more like a bark, as Ribiera flung himself to the ground and screamed hoarsely when the plane seemed about to pounce upon him. The shrill timbre of the shriek cut through the roaring of the motors, even through the thick padding of the big plane's cabin walls that reduced that roaring to a not intolerable growl.

But the plane passed ten feet or more above his head. It rose, and climbed steeply, and passed again above the now buzzing, agitated hangars, and climbed above the hills behind the flying field as some men went running and others moved by swifter means toward the shaken, nerve-racked Ribiera, on whose lips were flecks of foam.

Bell looked far below and far behind him. The incredible greenness of tropic verdure, of the jungle which rings Rio all about. The many glitterings of sunlight upon glass, and upon the polished domes of sundry public buildings, and the multitudinous shimmerings of the tropic sun upon the bay. The deep dark shadow of the banking clouds drew a sharp line across the earth, and deep in that shadow lay the flying field, growing small and distant as the plane flew on. But specks raced across the wide expanse. In a peculiar, irrational fashion those specks darted toward a nearly invisible speck, and encountered other specks darting away from that nearly invisible speck, and gradually all the specks were turned about and racing for the angular, toy-block squares which

were the hangars of the aeroplanes of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Little white things appeared from those hangars—planes being thrust out into the open air while motes of men raced agitatedly about them. One of them was suddenly in motion. It moved slowly and clumsily across the ground, and then abruptly moved more swiftly. It seemed to float upward and to swing about in mid-air. It came floating toward the amphibian, though apparently nearly stationary against the sky. Another moved jerkily, and another....

Just before the big plane dived into the wide white wall of falling water, the air behind it seemed to swarm with aircraft.

In the cabin of the amphibian, of course, the bellowing of the motors outside was muffled to a certain degree. Paula clung to the seats and moved awkwardly up to the place beside Bell. She had just managed to seat herself when the falling sheet of water obliterated all the world.

"Strap yourself in your seat," he said in her ear above the persistent tumult without. "Then you might adjust my safety-belt. We'll be flying blind in this rain. I hope the propellers hold."

She fumbled, first at the belt beside his upholstered chair, and only afterward adjusted her own. He sent a quick glance at her.

"Shouldn't have done that," he said quietly. "I can manage somehow."

The plane lurched and tumbled wildly. He kicked rudder and jerked on the stick, watching the instrument board closely. In moments the wild gyrations ceased.

"The beginning of this," he said evenly, "is going to be hectic. There'll be lightning soon."

Almost on his words the gray mist out the cabin windows seemed to flame. There was thunder even above the motors. But the faint, perceptible trembling of the whole plane under the impulse of its engines

kept on. Bell kept his eyes on the bank and turn indicator, glancing now and then at the altimeter.

"We've got to climb," he said shortly, "up where the lightning is, too. We want to pass the Serra da Carioca with room to spare, or we'll crash on it."

There was no noticeable change in the progress of the plane, of course. Rain was dashing against the windows of the cabin with an incredible velocity. Rain at a hundred miles an hour acts more like hail than water, anyhow, and Bell was trusting grimly to the hope that the propellers were of steel, which will withstand even hail, and a hope that the blast through the engine cowlings would keep the wiring free of water-made short circuits.

But the air was bad beyond belief. At times the plane spun like thistledown in a vast and venomous flood that crashed into the windows with a vicious rattling. Lightning began and grew fiercer. It seemed at times as if the plane were whirling crazily in sheer incandescent flame. The swift air-currents at the beginning of a tropic thunderstorm were here

multiplied in trickiness and velocity by the hills of the Serra da Carioca, and Bell was flying blind as well. The safety-belts were needed fifty times within twenty minutes, as the big ship was flung about by fierce blasts that sometimes blew even the rain upward for a time. And over all, as the amphibian spun madly, and toppled crazily and fought for height, there was the terrific, incessant crashing of thunder which was horribly close, and the crackling flares of lightning all about.

"I'm going to take a chance," said Bell curtly above the uproar, with the windows seeming to look out upon the fires of hell. "I think we're high enough. The compass has gone crazy, but I'm going to risk it."

Again there was no perceptible alteration in the motion of the ship, but he fought it steadily toward the west. And it seemed that he actually was passing beyond the first fierce fringe of the storm, because the lightning became—well, not less frequent, but less continuous.

And suddenly, in a blinding flare of light that made

every separate raindrop look like a speck of molten metal, he saw another airplane. It was close. Breathtakingly close. It came diving down out of nowhere and passed less than twenty yards before the nose of the amphibian. It glistened with wet, and glittered unbearably in the incredible brightness of the lightning. Every spot and speck and detail showed with an almost ghastly distinctness. But it dived on past, its pilot rigid and tense and unseeing, plunging like a meteor straight downward. The golden, iridescent mist of rain closed over its body. And it was gone.

Ten minutes later Bell was driving onward through a gray obscurity, which now was no more than tinted pink by receding lightning-flashes. The air was still uneven and treacherous. The big plane hurtled downward hundreds of feet in wild descending gusts among the hills, and was then flung upward on invisible billows of air for other hundreds of feet. But it was less uncontrollable. There were periods of minutes when the safety-belts did not come into use.

And later still, half an hour perhaps, the steadiness of

the air gave assurance that the plane was past the range of the Serra da Carioca and was headed inland. He drove on, watching his instruments and flying blind, but with a gathering confidence in an ultimate escape from the swarm of aircraft Ribiera had sent aloft in the teeth of the storm to hunt for him. The motors hummed outside the padded cabin. The girl beside him was very quiet and very still and very pale.

"We want to get out of this before long," he said in her ear, "and then we can find out where we are, and especially begin to make some plans for ourselves."

Her eyes turned to him. There was a curious stiffness in her manner. It might have seemed reserve, but Bell recognized the symptoms of a woman whose self-control is hanging by a thread. He smiled.

"Hold on a while yet," he said gently. "I know you want to cry. But please hold on a while yet. When we reach friends...."

Her hands went to her throat, and he could feel the effort of will that kept her voice steady.

"Friends? We have no friends." She managed a smile. "The Senhor Ribiera explained to me when I arrived at his house how it was that no questions would be asked about my disappearance. My father is dead. The newspapers this morning said that it was not known whether he killed himself or was assassinated. The Senhor Ribiera has given orders to his slaves. The newspapers of this afternoon will inform a horrified world that you and I, together, murdered my father that we might flee together with such of his riches as he had actually gathered together for me to take away. We are murderers, my friend. Cables and telegraph wires are reporting the news. The daughter of the Minister of War of the Republic of Brazil was assisted by her lover to murder her father. She has fled with him. Now—where are we still to find friends?"

Bell stared, for the fraction of an instant. One thought came to him, and was checked. The Trade does not exist, anywhere. The Trade would not help. And murderers are always duly handed over when the Government of the United States is requested politely

to do so by another nation. Always. And so far as the whole civilized world was concerned they were murderers. Even the employees of the flying field who were not subject to The Master would swear to the strictly accurate story of their escape together.

"It is just scandalous enough and horrible enough," said Bell quietly, "to be reprinted everywhere as news. You're right. We haven't any friends. We're up against it. And so I think we'll have to hunt down and kill The Master. Then we'll be believed. And there are just two of us, with what weapons we have in our pockets, to attack. How many thousands of slaves do you suppose The Master has by now?"

And, quite suddenly, he laughed.

CHAPTER 7

The sun was sinking slowly when the plane appeared above the valley. There was only jungle below. Jungle, and the languid river which now flowed sluggishly into a wide and shallow pool in which drowned trees formed a mass of substance neither land nor marsh nor river. The river now contracted to a narrow space

and showed signs of haste, and even foaming water, and then again flowed placidly onward, sometimes even a hundred yards in breadth. Shadows of the mountains to the west were creeping toward the opposite hill-flanks, darkening the thick foliage and sending flocks of flying things home to their chosen roosts.

The sound of the plane was a buzzing noise, which grew louder to a sharp drone as it seemed to increase in size, and became a dull monotonous roar as it dipped toward the waters of the stream. It floated downward, very gently, and circled as if regarding a certain spot critically, and resumed its onward flight. Again it circled, anxiously, now, as if the time for alighting were short.

It seemed to hesitate in mid-air, and dived, and circled up-stream and came down the valley again. It sank, and sank, lower and lower, until the white of its upper wings was hidden by the tall trees on either side.

A *jabiru* stork saw it from downstream, solemnly

squatting on four eggs which eventually would perpetuate the race. The *jabiru* was about forty feet above the water and had a clear view of the stream. The stork squatted meditatively, with its long, naked neck projecting above the edge of its nest.

The plane dipped ever lower, its reflection vivid and complete upon the waveless stream below it. Ten feet above the water. Five—and swift ripples from the rush of air disturbed the unbroken reflections behind. It was almost a silhouette against the mirrored appearance of the sunset sky. And then a clumsy-seeming boat body touched water with a vast hissing sound, and settled more and more heavily, while the speed of the plane checked markedly and its motors roared on senselessly.

Then, abruptly, the plane checked and partly swung around. The *jabiru* half-rose from its eggs. The motors were bellowing wildly again. As if tearing itself free, the plane sheered off from some invisible obstacle, one of its wing tip floats splashed water wildly, and, with the motors thundering at their fullest speed, it went toward the shore with a dragging wing, like

some wounded bird.

It beached, and the *jabiru* heard a sudden dense silence fall. A man climbed out of the boatlike body. He walked to the bow and dropped to the shore. He peered under the upward slanting nose of the boat-thing. The *jabiru*, listening intently, heard words.

Then, quite suddenly and quite abruptly, and generally with the unostentatious efficiency with which Nature manages such things in the tropics, night fell. It was dark within minutes.

The noise of Bell's scrambling back onto the deck of the amphibian's hull could be heard inside the cabin. He opened the door and slipped down inside.

"There ought to be some lights," he said curtly.

"Ribiera did himself rather well, as a rule."

He struck a match. Paula's eyes shone in the match-flame, fixed upon his face. He looked about, frowning. He found a switch and pressed it, and a dome-light came into being. The cabin of the plane, from a place

of darkness comparable to that of the jungle all about, became suddenly a cosy and comfortable place.

"Well?" said Paula quietly.

Bell hesitated, and took a deep breath.

"We're stuck," he said wryly. "We must have struck a snag or perhaps a rock, just under water. Half the bottom of the hull's torn out. There's no hope of repair. If I hadn't given her the gun and beached her, we'd have sunk in mid-stream."

Paula said nothing.

"Things are piling on us," said Bell grimly. "In the morning I'll try to make a raft. We can't stay here indefinitely. I'll hunt for maps and we'll try to plan something out. But I'll admit that this business worries me—the plane being smashed."

He passed his hand harassedly over his forehead. To have escaped from Rio was something, but since Paula had told him Ribiera's plans, it was clearly but

the most temporary of successes. Cabinet ministers are not so commonplace but that the scandalous and horrifying crime that was imputed to Bell and Paula would be printed in every foreign country.

Newspapers in Tokio would include the supposed murder in their foreign news, and in Bucharest and even Constantinople it would merit a paragraph or two. Assuredly every South American country would discuss the matter editorially, even where The Master's deputies did not order it published far and wide. There would be pictures of Bell and of Paula, labeled with an infamy. In every town of all Brazil their faces would be known, and those who were The Master's slaves would hunt them desperately, and all honorable men would seek them for a crime. Even in America there would be no safety for them. The Trade does not exist, officially, and a member of the Trade must get out of trouble as he can. As an accused murderer, Bell would be arrested anywhere. As worse than a mere murderess, Paula....

She was watching his face.

"This morning," she said queerly, "you—you quoted

'Nil desperandum.'"

Bell ground his teeth, and then managed to smile.

"If I looked like I needed you say that," he said coolly, "I deserve to be kicked. Let's look for something to eat, and count up our resources. The thing to do is, when you fall down—bounce!"

He managed a nearly genuine grin, then, and to his intense amazement, she sobbed suddenly and bent her head down and began to weep. He stared at her in stupefaction for an instant, then swore at himself for a fool. Her father....

Half an hour later he roused her as gently as he could. It was helplessness, as much as anything else, that had made him leave her alone; but a woman needs to weep now and then. And Paula assuredly had excuse.

"Here's a cup of coffee," he said practically, "which you must drink. You can't have had anything to eat all day. Have you?"

That question had haunted him too. She had been a prisoner in Ribiera's house for half an hour, possibly more. And Ribiera had in his possession, and used, a deadly, devilish poison from some unknown noxious plant. Its victim took the poison unknowingly, in a morsel of food or a glass of water or of wine. And for two weeks there was no sign of evil. And then the poison drove its victim swiftly mad—unless the antidote was obtained from Ribiera. And Ribiera administered the antidote with a further dose of poison.

If Paula had eaten one scrap of food or drunk one drop of water while Ribiera's captive....

She understood. She looked up suddenly, and read the awful anxiety in his eyes.

"No. Nothing." She caught her breath and steadied herself with an effort of the will. "I understand. You tried not to let me fear. But I ate nothing, touched nothing. I have not that to fear, at least."

"Drink this coffee," said Bell, smiling. "Ribiera was a

luxurious devil. There's canned stuff and so on in a locker. He was prepared for a forced landing anywhere. Flares and rockets will do us no good, but there are a pair of machetes and a sporting rifle with shells. We don't need to die for a bit, anyhow."

Paula obediently took the coffee. He watched her anxiously as she drank.

"Now some soup," he urged, "and the rest of this condensed stuff. And I've found some maps and there's a radio receiving outfit if—"

Paula managed to smile.

"You want to know," she said, "if I can endure listening to it. Yes. I—I should not have given way just now. But I can endure anything."

Bell still hesitated, regarding her soberly.

"I've heard," he said awkwardly, "that in Brazil the conventions...."

She waited, looking at him with her large eyes.

"I hoped," said Bell, still more unhappily, "to find this place Moradores, where you said you had some relatives. I hoped to find it before dark. But before I landed I knew I'd missed it and couldn't hope to locate it to-night. I thought—"

"You thought," said Paula, smiling suddenly, "that my reputation would be jeopardized. And you were about to offer—"

Bell winced.

"Of course I don't mean to act like an ass," he said apologetically, "but some people...."

"You forget," said Paula, with the same faint smile, "what the newspapers will say of us, Senhor. You forget what news of us the cables have carried about the world. I think that we had better forget about the conventions. As the daughter of a Brazilian, that remark is heresy. But did you know that my mother came from Maryland?"

"Thank God!" said Bell relievedly. "Then you can believe that I'm not thinking exclusively of you, and maybe we'll get somewhere."

Paula put out her hand. He grasped it firmly.

"Right!" he said, more cheerfully than ever before. "Now we'll turn on the radio and see what news we get."

Into the deep dark jungle night, then, a strange incongruity was thrust. Tall trees loomed up toward the stars. A nameless little stream flowed placidly through the night and, beached where impenetrable undergrowth crowded to the water's edge, a big amphibian plane lay slightly askew, while a light glowed brightly in its cabin. More, from that cabin there presently emerged the incredible sound of music, played in Rio for *os gentes* of the distinctly upper strata of society by a bored but beautifully trained orchestra.

The *jabiru* stork heard it, and craned its featherless neck to stare downward through beady eyes. But it

was not frightened. Presently, instead of music, there was a man's voice booming in the disconnected sounds of human speech. And still the *jabiru* was unalarmed. Like most of the birds whose necks are bald, the *jabiru* is a useful scavenger, and so is tolerated in the haunts of men. And if man's gratitude is not enough for safety, the *jabiru* smells very, very badly, and no man hunts his tribe.

Bell had been listening impatiently, when a sudden whining, whistling noise broke into the program of very elevated music, played utterly without rest. The sound came from the speaker, of course.

He frowned thoughtfully. The whistling changed in timbre and became flutelike, then changed again, nearly to its original pitch and tone.

Paula was not listening. Her mind seemed very far away, and on subjects the reverse of pleasurable.

"Listen!" said Bell suddenly. "You hear that whistle? It came on all at once!"

Paula waited. The whistling noise went on. It was vaguely discordant, and it was monotonous, and it was more than a little irritating. Again it changed timbre, going up to the shrillest of squealings, and back nearly to its original sound an instant later.

Bell began to paw over maps. The plane had been intended for flight over the vast distances of Brazil, and there was a small supply of condensed food and a sporting rifle and shells included in its equipment. Emergency landing fields are not exactly common in the back country of South America.

"Here," said Bell sharply. "Here is where we are. It must be where we are! No towns of any size nearby. No railroad. No boat route. Nothing! Nothing but jungle shown here!"

He frowned absorbedly over the problem.

"What is it?" asked Paula.

"Someone near," said Bell briefly. "That's another radio receiver, an old fashioned regenerative set,

sensitive enough and reliable enough, but a nuisance to everyone but its owner—except when it's a godsend, as it is to us."

The music ended, and a voice announced in laboriously classic Portuguese, with only a trace of the guttural tonation of the *carioca*, that the most important news items of the day would be given.

Paula paled a little, but listened without stirring. The voice read—the rustling of sheets of paper was abnormally loud—a bit of foreign news, and a bit of local news, and then....

She was deathly pale when the announcement of her father's death was finished, and she had heard the official view of the police reported—exactly what Ribiera had told her it would be. When the voice added that a friend of the late Minister of War, the Senhor Ribiera, had offered twenty contos for the capture of the fugitive pair, who had escaped in an airplane stolen from him, she bit her lip until it almost bled.

"I know," he said abstractedly. "It's as you said. But listen to that whistle."

The news announcement ceased. Music began again. The whistling abruptly died away.

"I just found some coils," said Bell feverishly, "that plug in to take the place of the longer-wave ones. I'm going to try them. It's a hunch, and it's crazy, but...."

There were sharp clickings. The radio receiver was one of those extraordinarily light and portable ones that are made for aircraft. In seconds it was transformed into a short-wave receiver. Bell began to manipulate the dials feverishly. Two minutes. Three. Four.

The speaker suddenly began to whine softly and monotonously.

"Regeneration," said Bell feverishly, "on a carrier-wave. It can't be far off, that receiving set."

Suddenly a voice spoke. It was blurred and guttural.

Infinitely delicate adjustments cleared it up. And then....

Bell listened eagerly, at first in triumph, then in amazement, and at last in a grim satisfaction. Reports from Rio on a short-wave band of radio frequencies were passing from Ribiera to some other place apparently inland. It was Ribiera's own voice, which quivered with rage as he reported Bell's escape.

"I do not think," he snapped in Portuguese, "that full details should be spoken even on beam wireless. I shall come to the fazenda to-morrow and communicate with The Master direct. In the meantime I have warned all sub-deputies in Brazil. I urge that all deputies be informed and instructed as The Master may direct."

Another voice replied that The Master would be informed. In the meantime the deputy for Brazil was notified.

This list of bits of information chilled Bell's blood. This man, of Venezuela, had been denied the grace of

The Master by the deputy in Caracas. He would probably use the passwords and demand the grace of The Master of sub-deputies in the State of Pará. To be seized and Caracas informed. The deputy in Colombia desired that the son of Colonel García—upon a hunting-party with friends in the Amazon basin—should be attached to the service of The Master. His father had been so attached, and it was believed had smuggled a letter into the foreign mail warning his son. If possible, that letter should be intercepted. And from Paraguay the deputy requested that the family of Senor Gomez, visiting relatives in Rio, should be induced to regard the service of The Master as desirable....

The orders ceased abruptly. Ribiera acknowledged them. The whining whistle cut off. And Bell turned to Paula very grimly indeed.

"Pretty, isn't it?" he asked in a vast calmness.

"Apparently every nation on the continent has some devil like Ribiera in charge of the administration of this fiendish poison. Every republic has some fiend at work in it. And they're organized. My God! They're

organized! The Master seems to supply them with the mixture of poison and its antidote, and they report to him...."

Paula nodded.

"That was what my father had written down for you," she said quietly. "Any man who can be lured to eat or drink anything these men have prepared is lost. He gains no pleasure, as a drug might give. He is entrapped into a lifetime of awful fear, knowing that a moment's disobedience, a moment's reluctance to obey whatever command they give, will cause his madness."

"I'm trying to think what we can work out of this," said Bell shortly. "Some things are clear. There's a radio receiving set nearby, which listened to those short-wave reports. Within five or six miles, at most. We're going to find that to-morrow. And there's a central point, a *fazenda*, where one may talk direct with The Master, whoever and wherever he may be. And—judging by Ribiera—my guess is that The Master has the same hold upon them that they have

on their underlings. Ribiera is too arrogant a scoundrel to make obsequious reports if he were not afraid to omit them." He was silent for a moment, thinking. Then he said abruptly, "Try to get some sleep, if you can. That pistol of Ribiera's—you have it handy? Keep it where you can reach it in the dark. I'm going to watch, though."

Paula settled herself comfortably, and looked queerly across the dimly lit little cabin at him.

"My friend," she said with the faintest of quavering smiles, "Please do not reassure me. I have the courage of endurance, at least. And—I do not fear you."

It seemed to Bell, listening in the darkness that fell when he turned off the switch, that she stayed awake for a long time. But when she did sleep, she slept heavily.

Bell had a raft of canes afloat beside the amphibian when she waked. He was sweat-streaked and bitten by many insects. He was tired, and his clothes were

rag. But the raft was nearly twenty feet long, it would easily float two persons and what small supplies the plane carried, and it could be handled by a long pole.

"Hullo," he said cheerfully when she climbed on top of the waterlogged hull of the plane. "We're nearly ready to start off. I'm sorry I can't advise you to try to refresh yourself in the river. There are some fish in it that are fiends. One of them took a slice out of the side of my hand."

"*Piranhas!*" she exclaimed, and was pale. "You should have known!"

Piranhas are small fresh-water fish of the Brazilian rivers, never more than a foot and a half long, which prove the existence of a devil. Where they swarm in schools they will tear every morsel of flesh from a swimmer's body as he struggles to reach shore, and leave a clean-stripped skeleton of a mule or horse if an animal should essay to swim a stream.

"I'll ask, next time," said Bell ruefully. "I'd planned a

swim. But if you'll fix some coffee while I finish up this raft, we'll get going. I don't think we're far from some place or other. I heard what sounded suspiciously like a motor boat, about dawn."

She looked at him anxiously.

"Of course," said Bell, smiling, "if the boat belonged to whoever listened in on the Rio broadcast *and* the short-wave news, he won't be especially friendly, though he should be glad to see us. But I've been studying the map, and I have a rather hopeful idea. Let's have coffee."

He grinned as long as she was in sight, and when he went into the cabin of the plane he seemed more cheerful still. But the idea of floating down this nameless little jungle stream upon a raft of canes was not one that he would have chosen. It was forced upon him. To travel through the jungle itself was next to impossible with a girl, especially as they were dressed for city streets and not at all for battling with dense and thorn-studded undergrowth. And to stay with the plane was obviously absurd. Sooner or later

they had to abandon it, though the moment they did desert it they would be encountering not only the impersonal menace of the jungle, but the actual enmity of all the human race. The raft was the only possibility.

It floated smoothly enough when they started off, with Bell working inexpertly with his long pole to keep it in mid-stream. He was, of course, acutely apprehensive. In country like this a rapid could be expected anywhere. The jungle life loomed high above their heads on either side, and the life of the jungle went on undisturbed by their passage. Monkeys gaped at them and exchanged undoubtedly witty comments upon their appearance. Birds flew overhead with raucous and unpleasant cries. Toucans, in particular, made a most discordant din. Once they disturbed a tiny herd of peccaries, drinking, which regarded them pugnaciously and trotted sturdily out of sight as they came abreast.

But for one mile, for two, the stream flowed smoothly. A third.... And Paula pointed ahead in silence. A dug-out projected partly from the shoreline. Bell wielded

his long pole cautiously now, and drew closer and ever closer to the stream bank. Paula pointed again. There was even a small dock—luxury unthinkable in these wilds.

The raft touched bottom. And suddenly from somewhere out of sight there came a horrible and a bestial sound. It was a scream of blood-lust, of madness, of overpowering and unspeakable rage. Following it came cackling laughter.

Paula went white.

"The *fazenda*," said Bell softly, "of the sub-deputy who was listening in on Ribiera last night. And it sounds as if someone were very much amused. Some poor devil...."

Paula shuddered.

"I'm going ashore," said Bell, smiling frostily. "There's nothing else to do."

CHAPTER VIII

Crouched at the edge of the jungle, where the clearing began, Paula heard four shots. Two in quick succession, and a wait of minutes. Then a third, and another long wait, and then the last. Then silence. Paula began to shiver. Bell had helped her ashore from the raft and insisted on her waiting at the edge of the jungle.

"Not that you'll be any safer," he had told her grimly, "but that I may be. One person can move more quickly than two. And if I'm chased I'll plunge for the place you're hidden, and you can open fire. Then the two of us might hold them off."

"Why?" Paula said slowly.

And Bell caught at her wrist.

"Don't let me hear you talk like that!" he said sharply. "We're going to beat this thing! We've got to! And being desperate helps, but being in despair doesn't help a bit. Buck up!"

He frowned at her until she smiled.

"I will not despair again without your permission," she told him. "Really. I will not."

He found her a hiding-place and went cautiously out into the clearing, still frowning.

He had been gone five minutes before the first shot sounded, and quite ten before the last rang out dully, and was echoed and re-echoed hollowly by the jungle trees. And Paula lay waiting by the edge of the clearing, Ribiera's pearl-handled automatic in her hand—Bell had carried the rifle from the plane. Small insects moved all about her, and she heard soft rustlings as the life of the jungle went on over her head and under her feet, and terror welled up in her throat.

She was trembling almost uncontrollably when Bell came back. He walked openly toward her hiding-place.

"Paula."

She came out, trying to steady her quivering lips.

"We're all right," said Bell grimly. "This is the *fazenda* of a sub-deputy. I suspect, also, it's an emergency landing field for Ribiera on the way to that place he talked to last night. There's a two-place plane here with both wheels and floats, in a filthy little shed. It seems to be all right. We're going to take off in it and try to make Moradores, where your people are. What's the matter?"

Her face was deathly pale.

"I thought," she said with some difficulty, "when I heard the shots—I thought you were killed."

Bell shook his head.

"I wasn't," he said grimly. "It was four other men who were killed."

He led her carefully past the house. It was a fairly typical *fazenda* dwelling, if more substantial than most. It was wholly unpretentious, with whitewashed walls, and the effect of grandeur it would give to natives of this region would come solely from the

number of buildings. There were half a dozen or more.

"I killed four men," repeated Bell coldly. "And I'm damned glad of it. That scream we heard.... I know pretty well what happened here last night.

Remember, Ribiera spoke of using a beam-wireless to make his report. He must have had a short-wave beam set somewhere on the outskirts of Rio, aimed at whatever headquarters he reports to. He's going up to that headquarters some time to-day, by plane, of course. He needed emergency landing fields along the route, and here he picked out a native and made him a sub-deputy. Charming...."

Moving past the buildings, Paula caught sight of massive wooden bars set in the side of a building. Something crumpled up and limp lay before them.

"Don't look over there," said Bell harshly. "There was a woman in this house and she told me what happened, though I'd guessed it before. The sub-deputy was here last night with a party of friends. Newly enslaved, some of them. He entertained

them.... Up at Ribiera's place a girl told me she and her husband had been shown a Secret Service man. He went mad before their eyes. It was an object-lesson for them, a clear illustration of what would happen to them if they ever disobeyed. I imagine that something of the sort is used by all The Master's deputies to convince their slaves of the fate that awaits them for disobedience. The local man had brought a party up to watch two men go mad. After that sight they'll be obedient."

He reached a shed, huge, but in disrepair. Monster doors were ajar. Bell heaved at them and swung them wide. A small, trim, two-seated plane showed in the shadowy interior.

"This is for emergency use," said Bell grimly, "and we face an emergency. I'll get it out and load it up. There's a dump of gas and so on here. You might look around outside the door, in case the one man who got away can find someone to help stop me."

He set to work checking on fuel and oil. He loaded extra gas in the front cockpit, a huge tin of it. Another

would crowd him badly in the pilot's cockpit in the rear, but he stowed it as carefully as he could.

"The local sub-deputy," he added evenly, "has added to the thrill by having the two men put in one cage. He let his guests observe the progress of the madness the damned poison produces. And presently, as the madness grew, the two men fought. They were murder mad.



[Image description start: A black and white illustration of two men in a cage with palm trees around them, lock together in a fight to the death.

Image description end.]

"The local sub-deputy gave his guests the thrill of watching maniacs battling to the death. He left early this morning with his party, and I imagine that everyone was suitably submissive to his demands for the future. There were four men and a woman left as caretakers here. I found the four men before the cage, baiting the poor devil who'd killed the other last night. That's why we heard the scream. When I came up with my rifle they stared at me, and ran.

"I got one then, and as a matter of mercy I put a bullet through the man who'd gone murder mad. The"—Bell sounded as if he were acutely nauseated—"the man he'd killed was still in the cage. My God!... Then I went looking for the other three men. Wasting time, no doubt, but I found them. I was angry. I got one, and the others ran away again. A little later the third man jumped me with a knife. He slit my sleeve. I killed him. Didn't find the fourth man." Bell moved to

the front of the plane. "I'll see if she catches."

He swung on the stick. It went over stiffly. Again, and again. With a bellow, the motor caught. Bell shouted in Paula's ear.

"We'll get in. Use the warming-up period to taxi out. We want to get away as soon as we can."

He helped her up into the seat, then remembered. He rummaged about and flung a tumbled flying suit up in the cockpit with her.

"If you get a chance, put it on!" he shouted. He stepped into a similar outfit, reached up and throttled down the motor, and kicked away the blocks under the wheels. He vaulted up into place. And slowly and clumsily the trim little ship came lurching and rolling out of the shed.

The landing field was not large, but Bell took the plane to its edge. He faced it about, and bent below the cockpit combing to avoid the slip stream and look at his maps again, brought from the big amphibian.

Something caught his eye. Another radio receiving set.

"Amphibian planes," he muttered, "for landing on earth or water. And radios. I wonder if he has directional for a guide? It would seem sensible, and if a plane went down the rest of them would know about where to look."

Paula reached about and touched his shoulder. She pointed. There was a movement at the edge of the jungle and a puff of smoke. A bullet went through the fusilage of the plane, inches behind Bell. He frowned, grasped the stick, and gave the motor the gun.

It lifted heavily, like all amphibians, but it soared over the group of buildings some twenty or thirty feet above the top of the wireless mast and went on, rising steadily, to clear even the topmost trees on the farther side of the stream by a hundred feet or more.

It went on and on, roaring upward, and the jungle receded ever farther below it. The horizon drew back and back. At two thousand feet the earth began to

have the appearance of a shallow platter. At three thousand it was a steep sided bowl, and Bell could look down and trace the meandering of the stream on which he had landed the night before. Not too far downstream—some fifteen miles, perhaps—were the squalid, toy sized structures of a town of the far interior of Brazil. He never learned its name, but even in his preoccupation with the management of the plane and a search for landmarks, he wondered very grimly indeed what would be the state of things in that town. If in Rio, where civilization held sway, Ribiera exercised such despotic though secret power, in a squalid and forgotten little village like this the rule of a sub-deputy of The Master could be bestial and horrible beyond belief.

Eastward. Bell had overshot the mark the night before. Before he had located himself he was quite fifty miles beyond the spot Paula had suggested as a hiding place. Now he retraced his way. A peak jutting up from far beyond the horizon was a guiding mark. He set the plane's nose for it, and relaxed.

The motor thundered on valorously. Far below was a

vast expanse of thick jungle, intercepted but nowhere broken by occasional small streams and now and then the tiny, angular things which might be houses. But houses were very infrequent. In the first ten miles—with a view of twenty miles in every direction—Bell picked out no more than four small groups of buildings which might be the unspeakably isolated *fazendas* of the folk of this region.

"Ribiera was coming this way," he muttered.

He fumbled the headphone of the radio set into place. The set seemed to be already arbitrarily tuned. He turned it on. There was a monotonous series of flashes, with the singing note of a buzzer in them. A radio direction signal.

"Ribiera's on the way."

Bell stared far ahead, without reason. And it seemed to him that just then, against that far distant guiding peak, he saw a black speck floating in mid-air.

He pulled back the joy stick. Detached, feathery

clouds spread across the sky, and he was climbing for them. Paula looked behind at him, and he pointed. He saw her seem to stiffen upon sight of the other aircraft.

In minutes Bell's plane was tearing madly through sunlit fleecy monsters which looked soft and warm and alluring, and were cold and damp and blinding in their depths. Bell kept on his course. The two planes were approaching each other at a rate of nearly two hundred miles an hour.

And then, while the harsh, discordant notes of the radio signal sounded monotonously in his ears, Bell stared down and, through a rift between two clouds, saw the other plane for an instant, a thousand feet below.

The sun shone upon it fiercely. Its propeller was a shimmering, cobwebby disk before it. It seemed to hang motionless—so short was Bell's view of it—between earth and sky: a fat glistening body as of a monstrous insect. Bell could even see figures in its cockpits.

Then it was gone, but Bell felt a curious hatred of the thing. Ribiera was almost certainly in it, headed for the place to which he had spoken the night before. And Bell was no longer able to think of Ribiera with any calmness. He felt a personal, gusty hatred for the man and all he stood for.

His face was grim and savage as his own plane sped through the clouds. But just as the two aircraft had approached each other with the combined speed of both, so they separated. It seemed only a moment later that Bell dipped down below the clouds and the other plane was visible only as a swiftly receding mote in the sunlight.

"I wonder," said Bell coldly to himself, with the thunder of the motor coming through the singing of the air route signal, "I wonder if he'll see the ship I cracked up last night?"

Paula was pointing. The shoulder of a hill upthrust beneath the jungle. The tall trees were cleared away at its crest. Small, whitewashed buildings appeared below.

"Good landing field," said Bell, his eyes narrowing suddenly. "On the direct route. Fifty miles back there's another landing field. I wonder...."

He was already suspicious before he flattened out above the house, while dogs fled madly. He noticed, too, that horses in a corral near the buildings showed no signs of fright. And horses are always afraid of landing aircraft, unless they have had much opportunity to grow accustomed to them.

The little plane rolled and bumped, and gradually came to a stop. Bell inconspicuously shifted a revolver to the outer pocket of his flying suit. Figures came toward them, with a certain hesitating reluctance that changed Bell's suspicions even while it confirmed them.

"Paula," he said grimly, "this is another landing field for Ribiera's emergency use. It sticks out all over the place. Relatives or no relatives, you want to make sure of them. You understand?"

Her eyes widened in a sudden startled fear. She

caught her breath sharply. Then she said quietly, though her voice trembled:

"I understand. Of course."

She slipped out of the plane and advanced to meet the approaching figures. There were surprised, astounded exclamations: A bearded man embraced her and shouted. Women appeared and, after staring, embraced. Paula turned to wave her hand reassuringly to Bell, and vanished inside the house.

Bell looked over his instruments, examined the gas in the tank, and began to work over his maps in the blaring sunlight. He cut out the switch and the motor stopped with minor hissings of compression. The maps held his attention, though he listened keenly as he worked for any signs of trouble that Paula might encounter.

He was beginning to have a definite idea in his mind. Ribiera had talked to a headquarters somewhere, by beam radio from Rio. Beam wireless, of course, is nothing more or less than a concentration of a radio

signal in a nearly straight line, instead of allowing it to spread about equally on all sides of the transmitting station. It makes both for secrecy and economy, since nearly all the power used at the sending apparatus is confined to an arc of about three degrees of a circle. Directed to a given receiving station, receiving outfits to one side or the other of that path are unable to listen in, and the signal is markedly stronger in the chosen path. Exactly the same process, of course, is used for radio directional signals, one of which still buzzed monotonously in Bell's ears until he impatiently turned it off. A plane in the path hears the signal. If it does not hear the signal, it is demonstrably off the straight route.

Bell, then, was in a direct line from Rio to the source of a radio direction signal. Fifty miles back, where the big amphibian had crashed, he was in the same air line. To extend that line on into the interior would give the destination of Ribiera, and the location of the headquarters where direct communication with The Master was maintained.

He worked busily. His maps were in separate sheets,

and it took time to check the line from Rio. When he had finished, he computed grimly.

"At a hundred miles in hour...." He was figuring the maximum distance which could plausibly be accepted as a day's journeying by air. He surveyed the maps again. "The plateau of Cuyaba, at a guess. Hm.... Fleets of aircraft could practise there and never be seen. An army could be maneuvered without being reported. Certainly the headquarters for the whole continent could be there. Striking distance of Rio, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, La Paz, and Asunción. Five republics."

Certainly, from his figures, it seemed plausible that somewhere up on the Plateau of Cuyaba—where no rails run, no boats ply, and no telegraph line penetrates; which juts out ultimately into that unknown region where the Rio Zingu and the Tapajoz have their origins—certainly it seemed plausible that there must lie the headquarters of the whole ghastly conspiracy. There, it might be, the deadly plants from which The Master's poison was brewed were grown. There the deadly stuff was measured out and mixed

with its temporary antidote....

Paula came back, a young man with her. Her eyes were wide and staring, as if she had looked upon something vastly worse than death.

"He—Ribiera," she gasped. "My uncle, he owned this place. They—have him here—alive—and mad! And all the rest...."

Bell fumbled in the pocket of his flying suit. The young man with Paula was looking carefully at the plane. And there was a revolver in a holster at his side. An air of grim and desperate doggedness was upon him.

"This is—my cousin," gasped Paula. "He—and his wife—and—and—"

The young man took out his weapon. He fired. There was a clanging of metal, the screech of tortured steel. Bell's own revolver went off the fraction of a second too late.

"You may kill me, Senhor," said the young man through stiff lips. His revolver had dropped from limp fingers. He pressed the fingers of his left hand upon the place where blood welled out, just above his right elbow. "You may kill me. But if you and my cousin Paula escaped.... I have a wife, Senhor, and my mother, and my children. Kill me if you please. It is your right. But I have seen my father go mad." Sweat, the sweat of agony and of shame, came out upon his face. "I fought him, Senhor, to save the lives of all the rest. And I have spoiled your engine, and I have already sent word that you and Paula are here. Not for my own life, but...."

He waited, haggard and ashamed and desperate and hopeless. But Bell was staring at the motor of the airplane.

"Crankcase punctured," he said dully. "Aluminum. The bullet went right through. We can't fly five miles. And Ribiera knows we're here—or will."

CHAPTER 9

There was the sound of weeping in the house, the gusty and hopeless weeping of women. Bell had been walking around and around the plane, staring at it with his hands clenched. Paula watched him.

"I am thinking," she said in an attempt at courage, "that you said I must not despair without your permission. But—"

"Hush!" said Bell impatiently. He stared at the engine. "I'd give a lot for a car. Bolts.... How many hours have we?"

"Four," said Paula drearily. "Perhaps five. You have smashed the radio in the house?"

Bell nodded impatiently. He had smashed the radio, a marvelously compact and foolproof outfit, arbitrarily tuned to a fixed short wave-length. It was almost as simple to operate as a telephone. There had been no opposition to the destruction. Paula's cousin had disabled their plane and reported their presence. He

was inside the house now, sick with shame—and yet he would do the same again. In one of the rooms of the house, behind strong bars, a man was kept who had been an object-lesson....

"Is there any machinery?" asked Bell desperately.

"Any at all about the place?"

Paula shook her head.

"It may be that there is a pump."

Bell went off savagely, hunting it. He came back and dived into the cockpit of the plane. He came out with a wrench, and his jaws set grimly. He worked desperately at the pump. He came back with two short, thick bolts.

He crawled into the plane again, tearing out the fire wall impatiently, getting up under the motor.

"We have one chance in five thousand," he said grimly from there, "of getting away from here to crash in the jungle. Personally, I prefer that to falling into

Ribiera's hands. If your cousin or anybody else comes near us, out here, call me, and I'll be much obliged."

There was the sound of scraping, patient, desperate, wholly unpromising scraping. It seemed to go on for hours.

"The wrench, please, Paula."

She passed it to him. The bullet had entered the aluminum crankcase of the motor and pierced it through. By special providence it had not struck the crankshaft, and had partly penetrated the crankcase on the other side. Bell had cut it out, first of all. He had two holes in the crankcase, then, through which the cylinder oil had drained away. And of all pieces of machinery upon earth, an aircraft motor requires oil.

Bell's scraping had been to change the punctured holes of the bullet into cone shaped bores. The aluminum alloy was harder than pure aluminum, of course, but he had managed it with a knife. Now he fitted the short bolts in the bores, forced the threads on them to cut their own grooves, and by main

strength screwed them in to a fit. He tightened them.

He came out with his eyes glowing oddly.

"The vibration will work them loose, sooner or later," he observed grimly, "and they may not be oil tight. Also, the crankshaft may clear them, and it may not. If we go up in the ship in this state we may get five miles away, or five hundred. At any minute it may fail us, and sooner or later it will fail us. Are you game to go up, Paula?"

She smiled at him.

"With you, of course."

He began to brush off his hands.

"There ought to be oil and gas here," he said briefly.

"Another thing, there'll probably be some metal chips in the crankcase, which may stop an oil line at any minute. It's a form of committing suicide, I imagine."

He went off, hunting savagely for the supplies of fuel

and lubricant which would be stored at any emergency field. He found them. He was pouring gasoline into the tanks before what he was doing was noticed. Then there was stunned amazement in the house. When he had the crankcase full of oil the young man came out. Bell tapped his revolver suggestively.

"With no man about this house," he said grimly, "Ribiera will put in one of his own choice. And you have a wife and children and they'll be at that man's mercy. Don't make me kill you. Ribiera may not blame you for my escape if you tell him everything—and you're hurt, anyway. Either we get away, and you do that, or you're killed and we get away anyhow."

He toppled two last five gallon tins of gasoline into the cockpits—crowding them abominably—and swung on the prop. The engine caught. Bell throttled it down, kicked away the stones with which he had blocked its wheels, and climbed up into the pilot's cockpit. With his revolver ready in his lap he taxied slowly over to a favorable starting point.

The ship rose slowly, and headed west again. At three thousand feet he cut out the motor to shout to Paula.

"One place is as good as another to us, now. The whole continent is closed to us by now. I'm going to try to find that headquarters and do some damage. Afterwards, we'll see."

He cut in the motor again and flew steadily westward. He rose gradually to four thousand feet, to five.... He watched his instruments grimly, the motor temperature especially. There were flakes of metal in the oil lines. Twice he saw the motor temperature rise to a point that brought the sweat out on his face. And twice he saw it drop again. Bits of shattered metal were in the oiling system, and they had partly blocked the stream of lubricant until the engine heated badly. And each time the vibration had shifted them, or loosened them....

They had left the big amphibian no earlier than nine o'clock. It was noon when they took off for the *fazenda* of Paula's kin. But it was five o'clock and after when they rose from there with an engine which

might run indefinitely and might stop at any second.

Bell did not really expect it to run for a long time. He had worked as much to cheat Ribiera of the satisfaction of a victory as in hopes of a real escape. But an hour, and the motor still ran. It was consistently hotter than an aero engine should run. Twice it had gone up to a dangerous temperature. One other time it had gone up for a minute or more as if the oiling system had failed altogether. But it still ran, and the sun was sinking toward the horizon and shadows were lengthening, and Bell began to look almost hopefully for a clearing in which to land before the dark hours came.

Then it was that he saw the planes that had been sent for him and for Paula.

There were three of them, fast two-seaters very much like the one he drove. They were droning eastward, with all cockpits filled, from that enigmatic point in the west. And Bell had descended to investigate a barely possible stream when they saw him.

The leader banked steeply and climbed upward toward him. The others gazed, swung sharply, and came after him, spreading out as they came. And Bell, after one instant's grim debate, went into a maple leaf dive for the jungle below him. The others dived madly in his wake. He heard a sharp, tearing rattle. A machine-gun. He saw the streaks of tracers going very wide. Gunfire in the air is far from accurate. A machine-gun burst from a hundred yards, when the gun has to be aimed by turning the whole madly vibrating ship, is less accurate than a rifle at six hundred, or even eight. Most aircraft duels are settled at distances of less than a hundred yards.

It was that fact that Bell counted on. With a motor that might go dead at any instant and a load of passengers and gas at least equaling that of any of the other ships, mere flight promised little. The other ships, too, were armed, at any rate the leader was, and Bell had only small arms at his disposal. But a plane pilot, stunting madly to dodge tracer bullets, has little time to spare for revolver work.

Bell had but one advantage. He expected to be killed.

He looked upon both Paula and himself as very probably dead already. And he infinitely preferred the clean death of a crash to either the life or death that Ribiera would offer them. He flattened out barely twenty yards above the waving branches that are the roof of the jungle. He went scudding over the tree tops, rising where the jungle rose, dipping where it dropped, and behind him the foliage waved wildly as if in a cyclone.

The other planes dared not follow. To dive upon him meant too much chance of a dash into the entrapping branches. One plane, indeed, did try it, and Bell scudded lower and lower until the wheels of the small plane were spinning from occasional, breath taking contacts with the feathery topmost branches of jungle giants. That other plane flattened out not less than a hundred feet farther up and three hundred yards behind. To fire on him with a fixed gun meant a dive to bring the gun muzzle down. And a dive meant a crash.

A stream flashed past below. There was the glitter of water, reflecting the graying sky. A downward current

here dragged at the wings of the plane. Bell jerked at the stick and her nose came up. There was a clashing, despite her climbing angle, of branches upon the running gear, but she broke through and shot upward, trying to stall. Bell flung her down again into his mad careering.

It was not exactly safe, of course. It was practically a form of suicide. But Bell had not death, but life to fear. He could afford to be far more reckless than any man who desired to live. The plane went scuttling madly across the jungle tops, now rising to skim the top of a monster *ceiba*, now dipping deliberately.

The three pursuing planes hung on above him helplessly while the short, short twilight of the tropics fell, and Bell went racing across the jungle, never twenty feet above the tree top and with the boughs behind him showing all the agitation of a miniature hurricane. As darkness deepened, the race became more suicidal still, and there were no lighted fields nearby to mark a landing place. But as darkness grew more intense, Bell could dare to rise to fifty, then a hundred feet above the tops, and the dangers of

diving to his level remained undiminished. And then it was dark.

Bell climbed to two hundred feet. To two hundred and fifty. With more freedom, now, he could take one hand from the controls. He could feel the menace of the tumultuously roaring motors in his wake, but he was smiling very strangely in the blackness. He reached inside his flying suit and tore away the front of his shirt. He reached down and battered in the top of one of the five gallon gasoline tins in the cockpit with the barrel of his revolver. He stuffed the scrap of cloth into the rent. It was wetted instantly by the splashing. Another savage blow, unheard in the thunder of the motor. In the peculiarly calm air of the cockpit the reek of gasoline was strong, but cleared away. And Bell, with the frosty grim smile of a man who gambles with his life, struck a light. The cloth flared wildly, and he reached his hands into the flame and heaved the tin of fuel overside.

The cloth was burning fiercely, and spilled gasoline caught in mid-air. A fierce and savage flame dropped earthward. Spark on the cloth, and the cloud of

inflammable vapor that formed where the leaking tin fell plummetlike, carried the flame down when the wind of its fall would have blown it out.

The following planes saw a flash of light. They saw a swiftly descending conflagration tracing a steep arch toward the tree tops. They saw that flaming vanish among the trees. And then they saw a vast upflaring of fire below. Flames licked upward almost to the tree tops....

Bell looked back from two thousand feet. Wing-tip lights were on, below, and disks of illumination played upon the roof of the jungle above the fire. The three planes were hovering over the spot. But a thick dense column of smoke was rising, now. Green things shriveling in the heat, and dried and rotted underbrush. Altogether, the volume of smoke and flame was very convincing evidence that an airplane had burst into flame in mid-air and crashed through the jungle top to burn to ashes beneath.

But Bell climbed steadily to five thousand feet. He cut out the motor, there, and in the shrieking and

whistling of wind as the plane went into a shallow glide, he spoke sharply.

"Paula?"

"I am all right," she assured him unsteadily. "What now?"

"There's a seat pack under you," said Bell. "It's a parachute. You'd better put it on. God only knows where we'll land, but if the motor stops we'll jump together. And I think we'll have to jump before dawn. This plane won't fly indefinitely. There's just one chance in a million that I know of. There'll be a moon before long. When it comes up, look for the glitter of moonlight on water. With the wing-tip lights we may—we may—manage to get down. But I doubt it."

He moved his hand to cut in the motor again. She stopped him.

"If we head south," she said unsteadily, "we may reach the Paraguay. It is perhaps two hundred miles, but it is broad. We should see it. Perhaps even the

stars...."

"Good work!" said Bell approvingly. "*Nils desperandum!* That's our motto, Paula."

He swung off his course and headed south. He was flying high, now, and an illogical and incomprehensible hope came to him. There was no hope, of course. He had had, more than once, a despairing conviction that the utmost result of all his efforts would be but the delaying of their final enslavement to The Master, whose apparent impersonality made him the more terrible as he remained mysterious. So far they seemed like struggling flies in some colossal web, freeing themselves from one snaring spot to blunder helplessly into another.

But the moon came up presently, rounded and nearly full. The sky took on a new radiance, and the jungle below them was made darker and more horrible by the contrast.

And when there were broad stretches of moonlit

foliage visible on the rising slopes beneath, Bell felt the engine faltering. He switched on the instrument board light. One glance, and he was cold all over. The motor was hot. Hotter than it had ever been. The oil lines, perhaps the pump itself....

Paula's hand reached back into the glow of the instrument board. He leaned over and saw her pointing. Moonlight on rolling water, far below. He dived for it, steeply. The wing-lights went on. Faint disks of light appeared far below, sweeping to and fro with the swaying of the plane, bobbing back and forth.

It seemed to Bell that there had been nothing quite as horrible as the next minute or two. He felt the overheated, maltreated motor laboring. It was being ruined, of course—and a ruined motor meant that they were marooned in the jungle. But if it kept going only until they landed. And if it did not....

White water showed below in the disks of the landing lights' glow. It tumbled down a swift and deadly *raudal*—a rapid. And then—black, deep water, moving

swiftly between tall cliffs of trees.

Bell risked everything to bank about and land toward the white water. The little plane seemed to be sinking into a canyon as the trees rose overhead on either side. But the moonlit rapid gave him his height, approximately, and the lights helped more than a little.

He landed with a terrific crash. The plane teetered on the very verge of a dive beneath the surface. Bell jerked back the stick and killed the engine, and it settled back.

A vast, a colossal silence succeeded the deafening noise of twelve cylinders exploding continuously. There were little hissing sounds as the motor cooled. There was the smell of burnt oil.

"All right, Paula?" asked Bell quietly.

"I—I'm all right."

The plane was drifting backward, now. It spun around

in a stately fashion, its tail caught in underbrush, and it swung back. It drifted past cliffs of darkness for a long time, and grounded, presently, with a surprising gentleness.

"Do you know," said Bell dryly, "this sort of thing is getting monotonous. I think our motor's ruined. I never knew before that misfortunes could grow literally tedious. I've been expecting to be killed any minute since we started off, but the idea of being stuck in the jungle with a perfectly good plane and a bad motor...."

He fished inside his flying suit and extracted a cigarette. Then he lit it.

"Let's see.... We haven't a thing to eat, have we?"

There was a little slapping noise. Bell became suddenly aware of a horde of insects swarming around him. Smoke served partially to drive them off.

"Look here," he said suddenly, "we could unfold a parachute and cover the cockpits for some protection

against these infernal things that are biting me."

"We may need the parachute," said Paula unsteadily.

"Does—does that smoke of yours drive them away?"

"A little." Bell hesitated. "I say, it would be crowded, but if I came up there, or you here...."

"I—I'll come back there," she said queerly. "The extra cans of gasoline here...."

She slipped over the partition, in the odd flying suit which looks so much more odd when a girl wears it. She settled down beside him, and he tried painstakingly to envelope her in a cloud of tobacco smoke. The plague of insects lessened.

There was nothing to do but wait for dawn. She was very quiet, but as the moon rose higher he saw that her eyes were open. The night noises of the jungle all about them came to their ears. Furtive little slitherings, and the sound of things drinking greedily at the water's edge, and once or twice peculiar little despairing small animal cries off in the darkness.

The jungle was dark and sinister, and all the more so when the moon rose high and lightened its face and left them looking into weird, abysmal blackness between moonlit branches. Bell thought busily, trying not to become too conscious of the small warm body beside him.

He moved, suddenly, and found her fingers closed tightly on the sleeve of his flying suit.

"Frightened, Paula?" he asked quietly. "Don't be. We'll make out."

She shook her head and looked up at him, drawing away as if to scan his face more closely.

"I am thinking," she said almost harshly, "of biology. I wonder—"

Bell waited. He felt an intolerable strain in her tensed figure. He put his hand comfortingly over hers. And, astoundingly, he found it trembling.

"Are all women fools?" she demanded in a desperate

cynicism. "Are we all imbeciles? Are—"

Bell's pulse pounded suddenly. He smiled.

"Not unless men are imbeciles too," he said dryly.

"We've been through a lot in the past two days. It's natural that we should like each other. We've worked together rather well. I—well"—his smile was distinctly a wry and uncomfortable one—"I've been the more anxious to get to some civilized place where The Master hasn't a deputy because—well—it wouldn't be fair to talk about loving you while—" he shrugged, and said curtly, "while you had no choice but to listen."

She stared at him, there in the moonlight with the jungle moving about its business of life and death about them. And very, very slowly the tenseness left her figure. And very, very slowly she smiled.

"Perhaps," she said quietly, "you are lying to me, Charles. Perhaps. But it is a very honorable thing for you to say. I am not ashamed, now, of feeling that I wish to be always near you."

"Hush!" said Bell. He put his arm about her shoulder and drew her closer to him. He tilted her face upward. It was oval and quite irresistibly pretty. "I love you," said Bell steadily. "I've been fighting it since God knows when, and I'm going to keep on fighting it—and it's no use. I'm going to keep on loving you until I die."

Her fingers closed tightly upon his. Bell kissed her.

"Now," he said gruffly, "go to sleep."

He pressed her head upon his shoulder and kept it there. After a long time she slept. He stirred, much later, and she opened her eyes again.

"What is it?"

"Damn these mosquitos," growled Bell. "I can't keep them off your face!"

CHAPTER 10

For four hours after sunrise Bell worked desperately. With the few and inadequate tools in the plane he

took apart the oiling system of the motor. It was in duplicate, of course, like all modern air engines, and there were three magnetos, and double spark plugs. Bell drained the crankcase beneath a sun that grew more and more hot and blistering, catching the oil in a gasoline can that he was able to empty into the main tanks. He washed out innumerable small oil pipes with gasoline, and flushed out the crankcase itself, and had at the end of his working as many small scraps of metal as would half fill a thimble. He showed then to Paula.

"And the stars in their courses fought against Sisera," he quoted dryly. "Any one of these, caught in just the right place, would have let us down into the jungle last night."

She smiled up at him.

"But they didn't."

"No.... God loves the Irish," said Bell. "What's that thing?"

Paula was fishing, sitting on a fallen tree in the cloud of smoke from a smudge fire Bell had built for her. She was wearing the oily flying suit he had found in the shed with the plane, and had torn strips from her discarded dress to make a fishing line. The hook was made out of the stiff wire handle of one of the extra gasoline tins. "Hook and leader in one," Bell had observed when he made it.

He was pointing to a flat bodied fish with incredible jaws that lay on the grass, emitting strange sounds even in the air. It flapped about madly. Its jaws closed upon a stick nearly half an inch thick, and cut it through.

"It is a *piranha*," said Paula. "The same fish that bit your hand. It can bite through a copper wire fastened to a hook, but this hook is so long...."

"Pleasant," said Bell. Something large and red passed before his eyes. He struck at it instinctively.

"Don't!" said Paula sharply.

"Why?"

"It's a *maribundi* wasp," she told him "And its sting.... Children have died of it. A strong man will be ill for days from one single sting."

"Still more pleasant," said Bell. "The jungle is a charming place, isn't it?" He wiped the sweat off his face. "Any more little pets about?"

She looked about seriously.

"There." She pointed to a sapling not far distant. "The *palo santo* yonder has a hollow trunk, and in it there are usually ants, which are called fire-ants. They bite horribly. It feels like a drop of molten metal on your flesh. And it festers afterwards. And there is a fly, the *berni* fly, which lays its eggs in living flesh. The maggot eats its way within. I do not know much about the jungle, but my father has—had a *fazenda* in Matto Grosso and I was there as a child. The *camaradas* told me much about the jungle, then."

Bell winced, and sat down beside her. She had

Ribiera's pearl handled automatic within easy reach. She saw him looking at it.

"I do not think there is any danger," she said with a not very convincing smile, "but there are *cururus*—water snakes. They grow very large."

"And I asked you to fish!" said Bell. "Stop it!"

She hauled the line ashore, with a flapping thing on the end of it. Bell took the fish off and regarded her catch moodily.

"I'd been thinking," he said moodily, "that Ribiera suspects we're dead. I'd been envisioning ourselves as marooned, yes, but relatively safe as long as we were thought to be dead. And I'd thought that if we lived a sort of castaway existence for a few weeks we'd be forgotten, and would have a faint chance of getting out to civilization without being noticed. But this...."

"I will stay," she said steadily. "I will stay anywhere or go anywhere, with you."

Bell's hand closed on her shoulder.

"I believe it," he said heavily. "And—if you noticed—I had been thinking of letting down the Trade. I'd been thinking of not trying to fight The Master any longer, but only of getting you to safety. In a sense, I was thinking of treason to my job and my government. I suspect"—he smiled rather queerly—"I suspect we love each other rather much, Paula. I'd never have dreamed for anyone else. Go over to the plane and don't fish any more. I'll rustle the food for both of us."

She stood up obediently, smiling at him.

"But kill that *piranha* before you try to handle it," she advised seriously.

Bell battered the savage thing until it ceased to move. He picked it up, then, and sniffed the air. Paula had been in a cloud of acrid smoke. She could not have detected the taint in the air he discovered. He went curiously, saw a broken branch overhead, and then saw something on the ground.

He came back to the plane presently, looking rather sick.

"Give me one of the machetes, Paula," he said quietly.
"We brought them, I think."

"What is the matter?"

He took the wide-bladed woods knife.

"A man," he said, nauseated. "He either fell or was thrown from somewhere high above. From a plane. He was United States Secret Service. There's a badge in his clothes. Don't come."

He went heavily over to the spot beyond the smudge fire. He worked there for half an hour. When he came back there were earth stains on his hands and clothing, and he carried a very small brown package in his hand.

"He had a report ready to send off," said Bell grimly.
"I read it. It's in code, of course, but in the Trade...."

He set to work savagely on the engine, reassembling it. As he worked, he talked in savage, jerky sentences.

"The Service man at Asunción. One of the seven who vanished. He'd learned more than we have. He was caught—poisoned, of course—and pretended to surrender. Told a great deal that he shouldn't, in order to convince The Master's deputy. The key men in nearly every republic in South America are in The Master's power. Paraguay belongs to him, body and soul. Bolivia is absolutely his. Every man of the official class from the President down knows that he has two weeks or less of sanity if The Master's deputy shuts down on him—and he knows that at the crook of the deputy's finger he'll be assassinated before then. If they run away, they go murder mad. If they stay, they have to obey him. It's hellish!"

He stopped talking to make a fine adjustment. He went on, somberly.

"Chile's not so bad off, but the deputy has slaves nearly everywhere. Ecuador—well, the President and half of Congress have been poisoned. The man I found

was trying to get a sample of the poison for analysis. He'd learned it was unstable. Wouldn't keep. The Master has to send fresh supplies constantly all over the continent. That accounts for the deputies remaining loyal. If The Master had reason to suspect them, he had only to stop their supply.... They couldn't stock up on the deadly stuff for their own use. So they're as abjectly subject to The Master as their slaves are to them. No new slaves are to be made in Paraguay or Bolivia, except when necessary. It's believed that in six months the other republics will have every influential man subjected. Every army officer, every judge, every politician, every outstanding rich man.... And then, overnight, South America will become an empire, with that devil of a Master as its overlord."

He lifted one of the oil pumps in place and painstakingly tightened the bolts that held it.

"Picture it," he said grimly. "Beasts as viceroys, already taking their pleasure. Caligulas, Neros, on viceregal thrones all over the continent.... And every man who shows promise, or shows signs of honor or

courage or decency, either killed or sent mad or...."

Paula was watching his face closely.

"I think," she said soberly, "that there is something worse."

Bell was silent for an instant.

"For me," he said bitterly, "it is. Before The Master dares to make his coup public, he must be sure that there will be no foreign interference. So, he must establish a deputy in Washington. A relatively few chosen men, completely enslaved, could hold back our Government from any action. Leaders in Congress, and members of the Cabinet, working, in defense of The Master because his defeat would mean their madness.... He would demand no treason of them at first. He would require simply that he should not be interfered with. But his plans include the appointment of deputies in the United States later on. I don't think he can subdue America. I don't think so. But he could—and I think he would—send whole cities mad. And if you think of that...."

He was silent, working. A long, long time later he swung on the propeller. The motor caught. He throttled it down and watched it grimly. The motor warmed up to normal, and stayed there.

"It will run," he said coldly. "Those two plugs in the crankcase may come out at any time. I've tightened them a little. They'd worked loose from the vibration. But—well.... That Service man was heading for Asunción. He'd been found out. They probably shot him down in mid-air after he'd gotten away. His plane may be crashed anywhere in the jungle within a mile or so. And I've two bearings on the *fazenda* where Ribiera went, now. One from Asunción through here and one from Rio. I want to go back there to-night and dump burning gasoline on the buildings, to do enough damage to disorganize things a little. Then I'm going to try to make it to a seaport. We can stow away, perhaps."

He shut off the motor.

"We'll start at dusk. There'll be lights there. This report says it's nearly a city—of slaves. We want the

darkness for our getaway."

Paula looked at the sky.

"We have three hours," she said quietly. "Let us cook and eat. You must keep up your strength, Charles."

She said it in all seriousness, with the air of one who has entire confidence and is merely solicitous. And Bell, who knew of at least three excellent reasons why neither of them should survive until dawn—Bell looked at her queerly, and then grinned, and then took her in his arms and kissed her. She seemed to like it.

And they lunched quite happily on *piranha* and *pacu*—which is smaller—and drank water, and for dessert had more *piranha*.

The long afternoon wore away slowly. It was hot, and grew blistering. Insects came in swarms and tormented them until Bell built a second and larger smudge fire. But they fastened upon his flesh when he went out of its smoke for more wood.

They talked, as well as they could for smoke, and looked at each other as well as they could for smarting eyes. It was not at all the conventional idea of romantic conversation, but it was probably a good deal more honest than most, because they both knew quite well that their chance of life was small. A plane whose motor was precariously patched, flying over a jungle without hope of a safe landing if that patched-up motor died, was bad enough. But with the three nearest nations subservient to The Master, whose deputy Ribiera was, and all those nations hunting them as soon as they were known to be yet alive....

"Would it not be wise, Charles," asked Paula wistfully, "just for us to try to escape, ourselves, and not try—"

"Wise, perhaps," admitted Bell, "but I've got to strike a blow while I can." He was staring somberly at the little plane, fast upon a mud bank, with the tall green jungle all about. "The deputies and all their slaves have their lives hanging by a thread—the thread of a constant supply of the antidote to the poison that's administered with the antidote. The deputies—Ribiera, for instance—don't realize that. Else they

wouldn't dare do the things they do. But let them realize that the thread can be broken, and what their slaves would do to them before they all went mad.... You see? Let them learn that a blow has been struck at the center of all the ghastly thing, and they'll be frightened. They'll be close to mutiny through sheer panic. And there may be slip-ups."

It was vague, perhaps, but it was true. The subjection of the poisoned men and women was due not only to terror of what would happen if they disobeyed the deputies, but to a belief that that thing would not happen if they did obey. If Bell could do enough damage to the *fazenda* of The Master to shake the second belief, he would have shaken the whole conspiracy. And a conspiracy that is not a complete success is an utter failure.

It was close to sunset when they heard a droning noise in the distance. Bell went swiftly to the cockpit of the plane and searched the sky.

"Don't see it," he said grimly, "and it probably doesn't see us. We're all right, I suppose."

But he was uneasy. The droning noise grew to a maximum and slowly died away again. It diminished to a distant muttering.

"What say," said Bell suddenly, "we get aloft now? We'll follow that damned thing home. It's going from Asunción to that place we want to find. This is on that route. Whoever's in it won't be looking behind, and it's close to darkness."

Paula stood up.

"I am ready, Charles."

Bell swung out on the floats and tugged at the prop. The motor caught and roared steadily. While it was warming up, he stripped off the rest of his shirt and tore it into wide strips, and tied the rags in the handles of the gasoline tins in the two cockpits.

"For our bombs," he explained, smiling faintly. "You'll want to wear your chute pack, Paula. You know how to work it? And we'll divide the guns and what shells we have, and stick them in the flying suit pockets."

He made her show him a dozen times that she knew how to pull out the ring that would cause the parachute to open. She climbed into the front cockpit and smiled down at him. He throttled down the motor to its lowest speed and shoved off from the mud bank. Clambering up, while the plane moved slowly over the water under the gentle pull of the slow-moving propeller, he bent over and kissed her.

"For luck," he said in her ear.

The next instant he settled down at the controls, glanced a last time at the instruments, and gave the motor the gun.

The plane lifted soggily but steadily and swept upstream toward the rolling water of the *raudal*, which tumbled furiously about an obstacle half of stones and shallows, and half of caught and rotting tree trunks. It rose steadily until the trees dropped away on either side and the jungle spread out on every hand. It rose to a thousand feet and went roaring through the air to northward, while Bell strained his eyes for the plane on ahead.

It was ten minutes or more before he sighted it, winging its way steadily into the misty distance above the jungle. Bell settled down to follow. The engine roared valorously. For half an hour Bell watched it anxiously, but it remained cool and had always ample power. Paula's head showed above the cockpit combing. Mostly she looked confidently ahead, but once or twice she turned about to smile at him.

The sun seemed high when they rose from the water, but as it neared the horizon its rate of descent seemed to increase. They had been in the air for no more than three-quarters of an hour when it was twice its own disk above the far distant hills. Almost immediately, it seemed, it had halved that distance. And then the lower limb of the blaring circle was sharply cut off by the hill crests and the sun sank wearily to rest behind the edge of the world.

It seemed as if a swift chill breeze blew over the jungle, in warning of the night. The trees became dark. A shadowy dusk filled the air even up to where the plane flew thunderously on. And then, quite abruptly, stars were shining and it was night.

Bell remembered, suddenly, and switched on the radio as an experiment. The harsh, discordant dashes sounded in his ears through the roaring of the motor. A beam of short waves was being sent out from his destination. While he was on the direct path the monotonous signals could be heard. When they weakened or died he would have left the way.

But they continued, discordant and harsh and monotonous, while the last faint trace of the afterglow died away and night was complete, and a roof of many stars glittered overhead, and the jungle lay dark and deadly below him.

For nearly half an hour more he kept on. Twice he switched on the instrument board light to glance at the motor temperature. The first time it appeared a little high. The second time it was normal again. But there was little use in watching instruments. If the motor failed there was no landing field to make for.

A sudden faint glow sprang into being, many miles ahead. The pinkish glare of many, many lights turned on suddenly. As the plane thundered on the glow grew

brighter. An illuminated field, for the convenience of messengers who carried the poison for The Master to all the nations which were to be subjected.

The glow went out as Bell was just able to distinguish long rows of twinkling bulbs, and he saw the harsher, fiercer glow of floodlights. He reached forward and touched Paula's shoulder. Conversation was impossible over the motor's roar. Her hand reached up and pressed his.

Then he saw other lights. Bright lights, as from houses. Arc lights as from storage warehouses, or something of the sort. A long, long row of lighted windows, which might be dormitories or perhaps sheds in which The Master's enslaved secretaries kept the record of his victims.

The earth flung back the roaring of the little plane's motor. Bell had but little time to act before other planes would dart upward to seek him out. He dived, and the wing tip landing lights went on, sending fierce glares downward. Twin disks of light appeared upon the earth. Sheds, houses, a long row of shacks

as if for laborers. A drying field, on which were spread out plants with their leaves turning brown. A wall about it....

"The damned stuff," said Bell grimly.

He swept on. Jungle, only jungle. He banked steeply as lights flicked on and off below and as—once—the wing tip lights showed men running frantically two hundred feet below.

Then a stream of fire shot earthward, and Bell held up his hand and arm into the blast of the slip stream. It blew out the blaze that had licked at his flesh. He stared down. The gas can had left a trailing stream of fluid behind it as it went spinning down to earth. All that stream of inflammable stuff was aflame. The can itself struck earth and seemed to explode, and the trailing mass of fire was borne onward by the wind and lay across a row of thatch-roofed buildings. An incredible sheet of fire spread out. The stuff in the drying yard was burning.

Bell laughed shortly, and flung over another of his

flaming bombs, and another, and the fourth....

He climbed for the skies, then, as rectangles of light showed below and planes were thrust out of their lighted hangars. Four huge conflagrations were begun. One was close by a monster rounded tank, and Bell watched with glistening eyes as it crept closer. Suddenly—it seemed suddenly, but it must have been minutes later—flame rushed up the sides of that tank, there was a sudden hollow booming, and fire was flung broadcast in a blazing, pouring flood.

"Their fuel tank!" said Bell, his eyes gleaming in the ruddy light from below. He shut off his landing lights and went upward, steeply. "I've played hell with them now!"

A thousand feet up. Two thousand. Two thousand five hundred.... And suddenly Bell felt cold all over. The instrument board! The motor was hot. Hot! Burning!

He shut it off before it could burst into flames, but he heard the squealing of tortured, unlubricated metal grinding to a stop. He leveled out. It was strangely,

terribly silent in the high darkness, despite the roaring of wind about the gliding plane. The absence of the motor roar was the thing that made it horrible.

"Paula," said Bell harshly, "one of those plugs came out, I guess. The motor's ruined. Dead. The ship's going to crash. Ready with your parachute?"

It was dark, up there, save for the glare of fires upon the under surface of the wings. But he saw her hand, encased by that glare, upon the combing of the cockpit. A moment later her face. She turned, light-dazzled, to smile back at him.

"All right, Charles." Her voice quavered a little, but it was very brave. "I'm ready. You're coming, too?"

"I'm coming," said Bell grimly. Below them was the city of The Master, set blazing by their doing. If their chutes were seen descending.... And if they were not.... "Count ten," said Bell hoarsely, "and pull out the ring. I'll be right after you."

He saw the slim little black-clad figure drop,

plummetlike, and prayed in an agony of fear. Then a sudden blooming thing hid it from sight. Thick clouds of smoke lay over the lights and fires below.

Bell stepped over the side and went hurtling down toward the earth in his turn.

Bell was falling head-first when the 'chute opened, and the jerk was terrific, the more so as he had counted not the customary ten, but fifteen before pulling out the ring. But very suddenly he seemed to be floating down with an amazing gentleness, with the ruddy blossom of a parachute swaying against a background of lustrous stars very far indeed over his head. Below him were masses of smoke and at least one huge dancing mass of flame, where the storage tank for airplane gas had exploded. It was unlikely in the extreme, he saw now, that anyone under that canopy of smoke could look up to see plane or parachute against the sky.

Clumsily enough, dangling as he was, Bell twisted about to look for Paula. Sheer panic came to him before he saw her a little above him but a long

distance off. She looked horribly alone with the glare of the fires upon her parachute, and smoke that trailed away into darkness below her. She was farther from the flames than Bell, too. The light upon her was dimmer. And Bell cursed that he had stayed in the plane to make sure it would dive clear of her before he stepped off himself.

The glow on the blossom of silk above her faded out. The sky still glared behind, but a thick and acrid fog enveloped Bell as he descended. Still straining his eyes hopelessly, he crossed his feet and waited.

Branches reached up and lashed at him. Vines scraped against his sides. He was hurled against a tree trunk with stunning force, and rebounded, and swung clear, and then dangled halfway between earth and the jungle roof. It was minutes before his head cleared, and then he felt at once despairing and a fool. Dangling in his parachute harness when Paula needed him.

The light in the sky behind him penetrated even the jungle growth as a faint luminosity. Presently he

writhed to a position in which he could strike a match. A thick, matted mass of climbing vines swung from the upper branches not a yard from his fingertips. Bell cursed again, frantically, and clutched at it wildly. Presently his absurd kickings set him to swaying. He redoubled his efforts and increased the arc in which he swung. But it was a long time before his fingers closed upon leaves which came away in his grasp, and longer still before he caught hold of a wrist-thick liana which oozed sticky sap upon his hands.

But he clung desperately, and presently got his whole weight on it. He unsnapped the parachute and partly let himself down, partly slid, and partly tumbled to the solid earth below.

He had barely reached it when, muffled and many times reechoed among the tree trunks, he heard two shots. He cursed, and sprang toward the sound, plunging headlong into underbrush that strove to tear the flesh from his bones. He fought madly, savagely, fiercely.

He heard two more shots. He fought the jungle in the darkness like a madman, ploughing insanely through masses of creepers that should have been parted by a machete, and which would have been much more easily slipped through by separating them, but which he strove to penetrate by sheer strength.

And then he heard two shots again.

Bell stopped short and swore disgustedly.

"What a fool I am!" he growled. "She's telling me where she is, and I—"

He drew one of the weapons that seemed to bulge in every pocket of his flying suit and fired two shots in the air in reply. A single one answered him.

From that time Bell moved more sanely. The jungle is not designed, apparently, for men to travel in. It is assuredly not intended for them to travel in by night, and especially it is not planned, by whoever planned it, for a man to penetrate without either machete or lights.

As nearly as he could estimate it afterward, it took Bell over an hour to cover one mile in the blackness under the jungle roof. Once he blundered into fire-ants. They were somnolent in the darkness, but one hand stung as if in white-hot metal as he went on. And thorns tore at him. The heavy flying suit protected him somewhat, but after the first hundred yards he blundered on almost blindly, with his arms across his face, stopping now and then to try to orient himself. Three times he fired in the air, and three times an answering shot came instantly, to guide him.

And then a voice called in the blackness, and he ploughed toward it, and it called again, and again, and at last he struck a match with trembling fingers and saw her, dangling as he had dangled, some fifteen feet from the ground. She smiled waveringly, with a little gasp of relief, and he heard something go slithering away, very furtively.

She clung to him desperately when he had gotten her down to solid earth. But he was savage.

"Those shots—though I'm glad you fired them—may

have been a tip-off to the town. We've got to keep moving, Paula."

Her breath was coming quickly.

"They could trail us, Charles. By daylight we might not leave signs, but forcing our way through the night...."

"Right, as usual," admitted Bell. "How about shells? Did you use all you had?"

"Nearly. But I was afraid, Charles."

Bell felt in his pockets. Half a box. Perhaps twenty-five shells. With the town nearby and almost certainly having heard their signals to each other. Black rage invaded Bell. They would be hunted for, of course. Dogs, perhaps, would trail them. And the thing would end when they were at bay, ringed about by The Master's slaves, with twenty-five shells only to expend.

The dim little glow in the sky between the jungle

leaves kept up. It was bright, and slowly growing brighter. There was a sudden flickering and even the jungle grew light for an instant. A few seconds later there was a heavy concussion.

"Something else went up then," growled Bell. "It's some satisfaction, anyway, to know I did a lot of damage."

And then, quite abruptly, there was an obscure murmuring sound. It grew stronger, and stronger still. If Bell had been aloft, he would have seen the planes from The Master's hangars being rushed out of their shelters. One of the long row of buildings had caught. And the plateau of Cuyaba is very, very far from civilization. Tools, and even dynamos and engines, could be brought toilsomely to it, but the task would be terrific. Buildings would be made from materials on the spot, even the shelters for the planes. It would be much more practical to carry the parts for a saw mill and saw out the lumber on the spot than to attempt to freight roofing materials and the like to Cuyaba. So that the structures Bell had seen in the wing lights' glow were of wood, and inflammable. The

powerhouse that lighted the landing field was already ablaze. The smaller shacks of the laborers perhaps would not be burnt down, but the elaborate depot for communication by plane and wireless was rapidly being destroyed. The reserve of gasoline had gone up in smoke almost at the beginning, and in spreading out had extended the disaster to nearly all the compact nerve-center of the whole conspiracy.

Presently the droning noise was tumultuous. Every plane in a condition to fly was out on the landing field, now brightly lighted by the burning buildings all about. There was frantic, hectic activity everywhere. The secretaries of The Master were rescuing what records they could, and growing cold with terror. In the confusion of spreading flames and the noise of roaring conflagrations the stopping of the motor up aloft had passed unnoticed. In the headquarters of The Master there was panic. An attack had been made upon The Master. A person who could not be one of his slaves had found his stronghold and attacked it terribly. And if one man knew that location and dared attack it, then....

The hold of The Master upon all his slaves was based on one fact and its corollary. The fact was, that those who had been given his poison would go murder mad without its antidote. The corollary was that those who obeyed him would be given that antidote and be safe. True, the antidote was but a temporary one, and mixed with it for administration was a further dosage of the poison itself. But the whole power of The Master was based on his slaves' belief that as long as they obeyed him abjectly there would be no failure of the antidote's supply. And Bell had given that belief a sudden and horrible shock.

Orders came from one frightened man, who cursed much more from terror than from rage. Ribiera had advised him. To do him justice, Ribiera felt less fear than most. Nephew to The Master, and destined successor to The Master's power, Ribiera dared not revolt, but at least he had little fear of punishment for incompetence. It was his advice that set the many aircraft motors warming up. It was his direction that assorted out the brainwork staff. And Ribiera himself curtly took control, indifferently abandoned the

enslaved workers to the madness that would come upon them, and took wing in the last of a stream of roaring things that swept upward above the smoke and flame and vanished in the sky.

Bell and Paula were huddled in between the buttress roots of a jungle giant, protected on three sides by the monster uprearings of solid wood, and Bell was absorbedly feeding a tiny smudge fire. The smoke was thick and choking, but it did keep off the plague of insects which make jungle travel much less than the romantic adventure it is pictured. Bell heard the heavy, thunderous buzzing from the town change timbre suddenly. A single note of it grew loud and soared overhead.

He stared up instinctively, but saw nothing but leaves and branches and many climbing things above him, dimly lighted by the smoky little blaze. The roaring overhead went on, and dimmed. A second roaring came from the town and rose to a monstrous growling and diminished. A third did likewise, and a fourth.

At stated, even intervals the planes at headquarters of

The Master took off from the landing field, ringed about with blazing buildings, and plunged through the darkness in a straight line. The steadier droning from the town grew lighter as the jungles echoed for many miles with the sounds of aircraft motors overhead.

At last a single plane rose upward and thundered over the jungle roof. It went away, and away.... The town was silent, then, and only a faint and dwindling murmur came from the line of aircraft headed south.

"They've deserted the town, by God!" said Bell, his eyes gleaming. "Scared off!"

"And—and we—" said Paula, gazing at him.

"You can bet that every man who could crowd into a plane did so," said Bell grimly. "Those that couldn't, if they have any brains, will be trying to make it some other way to where they can subject themselves to one of The Master's deputies and have a little longer time of sanity. The poor devils that are left—well—they'll be *camaradas*, *peons*, laborers, without the

intelligence to know what they can do. They'll wait patiently for their masters to come back. And presently their hands will writhe.... And the town will be a hell."

"Then they won't be looking for us?"

Bell considered. And suddenly he laughed.

"If the fire has burned out before dawn," he said coldly, "I'll go looking for them. It's going to be cold-blooded, and it's going to be rather pitiful, I think, but there's nothing else to do. You try to get some rest. You'll need it."

And for all the rest of the dark hours he crouched in the little angle formed by the roots of the forest giant, and kept a thickly smoking little fire going, and listened to the noises of the jungle all about him.

It was more than a mile back to the town. It was nearer two. But it was vastly less difficult to force a way through the thick growths by daylight, even though then it was not easy. With machetes, of

course, Bell and Paula would have had no trouble, but theirs had been left in the plane. Bell made a huge club and battered openings by sheer strength where it was necessary. Sweat streamed down his face before he had covered five hundred yards, but then something occurred to him and he went more easily. If there were any of the intelligent class of The Master's subjects left in the little settlement, he wanted to allow time enough for them to start their flight. He wanted to find the place empty of all but laborers, who would be accustomed to obey any man who spoke arrogantly and in the manner of a deputy of The Master. Yet he did not want to wait too long. Panic spreads among the *camarada* class as swiftly as among more intelligent folk, and it is even more blind and hysterical.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before they emerged upon a cleared field where brightly blooming plants grew hugely. Bell regarded these grimly.

"These," he observed, "will be The Master's stock."

Paula touched his arm.

"I have heard," she said, and shuddered, "that the men who gather the plants that go to make the poisons of the *Indios* do not—do not dare to sleep near the fresh-picked plants. They say that the odor is dangerous, even the perfume of the blossoms."

"Very probably," said Bell. "I wish I could destroy the damned things. But since we can't, why, we'll go around the edge of the field."

He went upwind, skirting the edge of the planted things. A path showed, winding over half-heartedly cleared ground. He followed it, with Paula close behind him. Smoke still curled heavily upward from the heaps of ashes which he reached first of all. He looked upon them with an unpleasant satisfaction. He had to pick his way between still smoking heaps of embers to reach the huts about which laborers stood listlessly, not working because not ordered to work, not yet frightened because not yet realizing fully the catastrophe that had come upon them.

He was moving toward them, deliberately adopting an air of suppressed rage, when a voice called whiningly.

"Senhor! Senhor!" And then pleadingly, in Portuguese, "I have news for The Master! I have news for The Master!"

Bell jerked his head about. Bars of thick wood, cemented into heavy timbers at top and bottom. A building that was solid wall on three sides, and the fourth was bars. A white man in it, unshaven, haggard, ragged, filthy. And on the floor of the cage....

There had been another such cage on a *fazenda* back toward Rio. Bell had looked into it, and had shot the gibbering Thing that had been its occupant, as an act of pure mercy. But this man had been through horrors and yet was sane.

"Don't look," said Bell sharply to Paula. He went close.

The figure pressed against the bars, whining. And suddenly it stopped its fawning.

"The devil!" said the white man in the cage. "What in hell are you doing here, Bell? Has that fiend caught

you too?"

"Oh, my God!" gasped Bell. He went white with a cold rage. He'd known this man before. A Secret Service man—one of the seven who had vanished. "How's this place opened? I'll let you out."



[Image description start: A black and white illustration showing Agent Bell recoiling in horror from a row of bars, on the other side of which a man lays on his stomach, reaching through the bars in desperation. Image description end.]

"It may be dangerous," said the white man with a ghastly grin. "I'm one of The Master's little victims. I've been trying to work a little game in hopes of getting within arm's reach of him. How'd you get here? Has he got you too?"

"I burned the damned town last night," snarled Bell, "and crashed up after it. Where's that door?"

He found it, a solid mass of planks with a log bar fitted in such a way that it could not possibly be opened from within. He dragged it wide. The white man came out, holding to his self-control with an obvious effort.

"I want to dance and sing because I'm out of there," he told Bell queerly, "but I know you've done me no good. I've been fed The Master's little medicine. I've been in that cage for weeks."

Bell, quivering with rage, handed him a revolver.

"I'm going to get some supplies and stuff and try to make it to civilization," he said shortly. "If you want to

help...."

"Hell, yes," said the white man drearily. "I might as well. Number One-Fourteen was here.... He's The Master's little pet, now. Turned traitor. Report it, if you ever get out."

"No," said Bell briefly. "He didn't turn." He told in a very few words of the finding of the body of a man who had fallen or been thrown from a plane into the jungle.

They were moving toward the rows of still standing shacks, then, and faces were beginning to turn toward them, and there was a little stir of apathetic puzzlement at sight of the white man who had been set free.

That white man looked suddenly at Paula, and then at Bell.

"I've been turned into a beast," he said wryly. "Look here, Bell. There were as many as ten and fifteen of us in that cage at one time—men the deputies sent up

for the purpose. We were allowed to go mad, one and two at a time, for the edification of the populace, to keep the *camaradas* scared. And those of us who weren't going mad just then used to have to band together and kill them. That cage has been the most awful hell on earth that any devil ever contrived. They put three women in there once, with their hands already writhing.... Ugh!..."

Bell's face was cold and hard as if carved from marble.

"I haven't lived through it," said the white man harshly, "by being soft. And I've got less than no time to live—sane, anyhow. I was thinking of shooting you in the back, because the young lady—"

He laughed as Bell's revolver muzzle stirred.

"I'm telling you," said the white man in ghastly merriment, "because I thought—I thought One-Fourteen had set me the example of ditching the Service for his own life. But now it's different."

He pointed.

"There's a launch in that house, with one of these outboard motors. It was used to keep up communication with the boat gangs that sweat the heavy supplies up the river. It'll float in three inches of water, and you can pole it where the water's too shallow to let the propeller turn. This rabble will mob you if you try to take it, because it'll have taken them just about this long to realize that they're deserted. They'll think you are a deputy, at least, to have dared release me. I'm going to convince them of it, and use this gun to give you a start. I give you two hours. It ought to be enough. And then...."

Bell nodded.

"I'm not Service," he said curtly, "but I'll see it's known."

The white man laughed again.

"Some sigh for the glories of this world, and some for a prophet's paradise to come," he quoted derisively. "I thought I was hard, Bell, but I find I prefer to have my record clean in the Service—where nobody will

ever see it—than to take what pleasure I might snatch before I die. Queer, isn't it? Old Omar was wrong. Now watch me bluff, flinging away the cash for credit of doubtful value, and all for the rumble of a distant drum—which will be muted!"

They were surrounded by swarming, fawning, frightened *camaradas* who implored the Senhor to tell them if he were a deputy of The Master, and if he were here to make sure nothing evil befell them. They worked for The Master, and they desired nothing save to labor all their lives for The Master, only—only—The Master would allow no evil to befall them?

The white man waved his arms grandiloquently.

"The Senhor you behold," he proclaimed in the barbarous Portugese of the hinterland of Brazil, "has released me from the cage in which you saw me. He is the deputy of The Master himself, and is enraged because the landing lights on the field were not burning, so that his airplane fell down into the jungle. He bears news of great value from me to The Master, which will make me finally a sub-deputy of The

Master. And I have a revolver, as you see, with which I could kill him, but he dares not permit me to die, since I have given him news for The Master. I shall wait here and he will go and send back an airplane with the grace of The Master for me and for all of you."

Bell snarled an assent, in the arrogant fashion of the deputies of The Master. He waited furiously while the Service man argued eloquently and fluently. He fingered his revolver suggestively when a wave of panic swept over the swarming mob for no especial reason. And then he watched grimly while the light little metal-bottomed boat was carried to the water's edge and loaded with food, and fuel, and arms, and ammunition, and even mosquito bars.

The white man grinned queerly at Bell as he extended his hand in a last handshake.

"I, who am about to die, salute you!" he said mockingly. "Isn't this a hell of a world, Bell? I'm sure we could design a better one in some ways."

Bell felt a horrible, a ghastly shock. The hand that gripped his was writhing in his grasp.

"Quite so," said the white man. "It started about five minutes ago. In theory, I've about forty-eight hours. Actually, I don't dare wait that long, if I'm to die like a white man. And a lingering vanity insists on that. I hope you get out, Bell.... And if you want to do me a favor,"—he grinned again, mirthlessly—"you might see that The Master and as many of his deputies as you can manage join me in hell at the earliest possible moment. I shan't mind so much if I can watch them."

He put his hands quickly in his pockets as the little outboard motor caught and the launch went on down-river. He did not even look after them. The last Bell saw of him he was swaggering back up the little hillside above the river edge, surrounded by scared inhabitants of the workmen's shacks, and scoffing in a superior fashion at their fears.

CHAPTER 12

It took Bell just eight days to reach the Paraguay, and

those eight days were like an age-long nightmare of toil and discomfort and more than a little danger. The launch was headed downstream, of course, and with the current behind it, it made good time. But the distances of Brazil are infinite, and the jungles of Brazil are malevolent, and the route down the Rio Laurenço was designed by the architect of hell.

Raudales lay in wait to destroy the little boat. Insects swarmed about to destroy its voyagers. And the jungle loomed above them, passively malignant, and waited for them to die.

And as if physical sufferings were not enough, Bell saw Paula wilt and grow pale. All the way down the river they passed little clearings at nearly equal distances. And men came trembling out of the little houses upon those *fazendas* and fawned upon the Senhor who was in the launch that had come from up-river and so must be in the service of The Master himself. The clearings and the tiny houses had been placed upon the river for the service of the terribly laboring boat gangs who brought the heavier supplies up the river to The Master's central depot. Men at

these clearings had been enslaved and ordered to remain at their posts, serving all those upon the business of The Master. They fawned abjectly upon Bell, because he was of *os gentes* and so presumably was empowered, as The Master had empowered his more intelligent subjects, to exact the most degraded of submission from all beneath him in the horrible conspiracy. Once, indeed, Bell was humbly implored by a panic stricken man to administer "the grace of The Master" to a moody and irritable child of twelve or so.

"She sees the red spots, Senhor. It is the first sign. And I have served The Master faithfully...."

And Bell could do nothing. He went on savagely. And once he passed a gang of *camaradas* laboring to get heavily loaded dugouts up a fiendish *raudal*. They had ropes out and were hauling at them from the bank, while some of their number were breast-deep in the rushing water, pushing the dugouts against the stream.

"They're headed for the plantation," said Bell grimly,

"and they'll need the grace of The Master by the time they get there. And it's abandoned. But if I tell them...."

Men with no hope at all are not to be trusted. Not when they are mixtures of three or more races—white and black and red—and steeped in ignorance and superstition and, moreover, long subject to such masters as these men had had. Bell had to think of Paula.

He could have landed and haughtily ordered them to float or even carry the light boat to the calmer waters below. They would have obeyed and cringed before him. But he shot the rapids from above, with the little motor roaring past rocks and walls of jungle beside the foaming water, at a speed that chilled his blood.

Paula said nothing. She was white and listless. Bell, himself, was being preyed upon by a bitter blend of horror and a deep-seated rage that consumed him like a fever. He had fever itself, of course. He was taking, and forcing Paula to take, five grains of quinine a day. It had been included among his stores as a matter of

course by those who had loaded his boat. And with the fever working in his brain he found himself holding long, imaginary conversations, in which one part of his brain reproached the other part for having destroyed the plantation of The Master. The laborers upon that plantation had been abandoned to the murder madness because of his deed. The caretakers of the tiny *fazenda* on the river bank were now ignored. Bell felt himself a murderer because he had caused The Master's deputies to cast them off in a callous indifference to their inevitable fate.

He suffered the tortures of the damned, and grew morose and bitter, and could only escape that self torture by coddling his hatred of Ribiera and The Master. He imagined torments to be inflicted upon them which would adequately repay them for their crimes, and racked his feverish brain for memories of the appalling atrocities which can be committed upon the human body without destroying its capacity to suffer.

It was not normal. It was not sane. But it filled Bell's mind and somehow kept him from suicide during the

horrible passage of the river. He hardly dared speak to Paula. There was a time when he counted the days since he had been a guest at Ribiera's estate outside of Rio, and frenziedly persuaded himself that he saw red spots before his eyes and soon would have the murder madness come upon him. And then he thought of the supplies in Ribiera's plane, in which they had escaped from Rio. They had eaten that food.

It was almost unconsciously, then, that he saw the narrow water on which the launch floated valiantly grow wider day by day. When at last it debouched suddenly into a vast stream whereon a clumsy steamer plied beneath a self made cloud of smoke, he stared dully at it for minutes before he realized.

"Paula," he said suddenly, and listened in amazement to his voice. It was hoarse and harsh and croaking. "Paula, we've made it. This must be the Paraguay."

She roused herself and looked about like a person waking from a lethargic sleep. And then her lips quivered, and she tried to speak and could not, and tears fell silently from her eyes, and all at once she

was sobbing bitterly.

That sign of the terrific strain she had been under served more than anything else to jolt Bell out of his abnormal state of mind. He moved over to her and clumsily put his arm about her, and comforted her as best he could. And she sat sobbing with her head on his shoulder, gasping in a form of hysterical relief, until the engine behind them sputtered, and coughed, and died.

When Bell looked, the last drop of gasoline was gone. But the motor had served its purpose. It had run manfully on an almost infinitesimal consumption of gasoline for eight days. It had not missed an explosion save when its wiring was wetted by spray. And now....

Bell hauled the engine inboard and got out the oars from under the seats. He got the little boat out to mid-stream, and they floated down until a village of squalid huts appeared on the eastern bank. He landed, there, and with much bargaining and a haughty demeanor disposed of the boat to the skipper of a *batelao* in exchange for passage down-river as far

as Corumba. The rate was outrageously high. But he had little currency with him and dared go no farther on a vessel which carried a boat of The Master's ownership conspicuously towed behind.

At Corumba he purchased clothes less obviously of *os gentes*, both for himself and for Paula, and that same afternoon was able to arrange for their passage to Asunción as deck passengers on a river steamer going downstream.

It was as two peasants, then, that they rode in sweltering heat amid a swarming and odorous mass of fellow humanity downstream. But it was a curious relief, in some ways. The people about them were gross and unwashed and stupid, but they were human. There was none of that diabolical feeling of terror all about. There were no strained, fear haunted faces upon the deck reserved for deck passengers and other cattle. The talk was ungrammatical and literal and of the earth. The women were stolid-faced and reserved. But when the long rows of hammocks were slung out in the open air, in the casual fashion of sleeping arrangements in the back-country of all

South America, it was blessedly peaceful to realize that the folk who snored so lustily were merely human; human animals, it might be, with no thought above their *farinha* and *feijos* on the morrow, but human.

And the second day they passed the old fort at Coimbra, and went on. The passage into Paraguayan territory was signalized by an elaborate customs inspection, and three days later Asunción itself displayed its red-tiled roofs and adobe walls upon the shore.

Bell had felt some confidence in his ability to pass muster with his Spanish, though his Portuguese was limited, and it was a shock when the captain of the steamer summoned him to his cabin with a gesture, before the steamer docked. Bell left Paula among the other deck passengers and went with the peasant's air of suspicious humility into the captain's quarters. But the captain's pose of grandeur vanished at once when the door closed.

"Señor," said the steamer captain humbly, "I have not

spoken to you before. I knew you would not wish it. But tell me, senor! Have you any news of what The Master plans?"

Bell's eyes flickered, at the same time that a cold apprehension filled him.

"Why do you speak to me of The Master?" he demanded sharply.

The steamer captain stammered. The man was plainly frightened at Bell's tone. Bell relaxed, his flash of panic for Paula gone.

"I know," said the captain imploringly, "that the great *fazenda* has been deserted. On my last trip, down, senor, I brought many of the high deputies who had been there. They warned me not to speak, senor, but I saw that you were not what you seemed, and I thought you might be going about to see who obeyed The Master's orders...."

Bell nodded.

"That is my mission," he said curtly. "Do not speak of it further—not even to the deputy in Asunción."

The captain stammered again.

"But I must see the Señor Francia," he said humbly. "I report to him after every trip, and if he thought that I did not report all that I learn...."

"It is my order," snapped Bell angrily. "If he reproaches you, say that one who has orders from The Master himself gave them to you. And do not speak of the destruction of the *fazenda*. I am searching especially for the man who caused it. And—wait! I will take your name, and you shall give me—say—a thousand pesos. I had need of money to bribe a fool I could not waste time on, up-country. It will be returned to you."

And again the captain stammered, but Bell stared at him haughtily, and he knelt abjectly before the ship's safe.

Asunción, as everybody knows, is a city of sixty

thousand people, and the capital of a republic which enjoyed the rule of a family of hereditary dictators for sixty years; which rule ended in a war wherein four-fifths of the population was wiped out. And since that beginning it has averaged eight revolutions to Mexico's three, has had the joy of knowing seven separate presidents in five years—none of them elected—and now boasts a population approximately two-thirds illegitimate and full of pride in its intellectual and artistic tastes.

Bell and Paula made their way along the cobbled streets away from the river, surrounded by other similarly peasant-seeming folk. Bell told her curtly what had happened with the steamer captain.

"It's the devil," he said coldly, "because this whole republic is under The Master's thumb. Except among the peasants we can count on nearly everybody being on the lookout for us, if they so much as suspect we're alive. And they may because I burned their damned *fazenda*. So...."

Paula smiled at him, rather wanly.

"What are you going to do, Charles?"

"Get a boat," said Bell curtly. "One with three or four men, if I can. If I can buy it with the skipper's money, I will. But I can't take you to go bargaining. It would look suspicious."

They had reached the central plaza of the town. The market swarmed with brown skinned folk and seemed to overflow with fruits. A man was unconcernedly shoveling oranges out of a cart with a shovel, as if they had been so much coal. A market woman as unconcernedly dropped some of the same golden fruit within a small pen where a piglet awaited a purchaser. To the left, there were rows of unshaded stalls where the infinitely delicate handmade Paraguayan lace was exposed for sale.

"I—think," said Paula, "I think I will go in the cathedral. I will be very devout, Charles, and you will find me there when you return. I will be safe there, certainly."

He walked with her across the crowded plaza. He

should have known that your peasant does not stride with head up, but regarding the ground. That a man who works heavily droops his shoulders with weariness at the end of a day. And especially he should have realized that Paraguay is not, strictly speaking, a Latin-American nation. It is Latin-Indian, in which the population graduates very definitely from a sub-stratum of nearly or quite pure Indian race to an aristocracy of nearly or quite pure Spanish descent, and that the color of a man's skin fixes his place in society. Both Bell and Paula were too light of skin for the peasant's clothes they wore. They aroused curiosity at once. If it was not an active curiosity, it was nevertheless curiosity of a sort.

But Bell left her in the shadowy, cool interior of the cathedral which seems so pitifully small to be the center of religion for a nation. He saw her move toward one of the little candle-lit niches in the wall and fall quite simply on her knees there.

And he moved off, to wander aimlessly down to the river shore and stare about and presently begin a desultory conversation with sleepy boatmen.

It was three hours and more before he returned to the Cathedral, and Paula was talking to someone. More, talking to a woman in the most discreet of mantilla'd church-going costumes. Paula saw him in the doorway, and uttered a little cry of relief. She came hurrying to him.

"Charles! I have found a friend! Isabella Ybarra. We were schoolmates in the United States and she has just come back from Paris! So you see, she cannot—"

"I see," said Bell very quietly.

Paula was speaking swiftly and very softly.

"We went to school together, Charles. I trust her. You must trust her also. There is no danger, this time. Isabella has never even heard of The Master. So you see...."

"I see that you need someone you can trust," said Bell grimly. "*I* found that the captain of the steamer had gone to The Master's deputy here. While I was talking to some boatmen a warning was given to look out for

a man and woman, together, who may try to buy a boat. We're described, and only the fact that I was alone kept me from being suspected. Police, soldiers—everybody is looking out for us. Paraguay's under The Master's thumb more completely than any other nation on the continent."

The figure to which Paula had been talking was moving slowly toward them. A smiling, brown-eyed face twinkled at them.

"You must be Charles!" said a warm and cluckling voice. "Paula has raved, Señor. Now I am going to take her off in my carriage. She is my maid. And you will follow the carriage on foot and I will have the major-domo let you in the servants' entrance, and the three of us will conspire."

It was incongruous to hear the English of a girl's finishing school from the mantilla'd young woman who beamed mischievously at him. She had the delighted air of one aiding a romance. It was doubly incongruous because of the dark and shadowy Cathedral in which they were, and the raucous noises

of the market in the plaza without. Bell had a sense of utter unreality as Isabella's good humored voice went on:

"Do you remember, Paula, the time the French teacher caught us in the pantry? I shall feel just like that time."

"This is dangerous," said Bell, steadily, "and it is very serious indeed."

"Pooh!" said Isabella comfortably. "Paula, you didn't even know I was married! A whole year and a half! And he's a darling, really. I'm the Señora Isabella Ybarra de Zuloaga, if you please! Bow gracefully!" She chuckled. "Jaime came all the way to Rio to meet me last month. I'm wild about him, Paula.... But come on! Follow me humbly, like a nice little *mestizo* girl who wants to be my maid, and I'll let you ride with the *cochero* and Charles shall follow behind us."

She swept out of the Cathedral with the air of a grande dame suppressing a giggle, and Paula went humbly behind her.

And Bell trudged through the dust and the blistering sun while the highly polished carriage jolted over cobble stones and the youthful Señora Isabella Ybarra de Zuloaga beamed blissfully at the universe which did not realize that she was a conspirator, and Paula sat modestly beside the brown skinned *cochero*.

It was not a long ride nor a long walk, though the sun was insufferable. The capital of Paraguay is not large. It is a sleepy, somnolent little town in which the most pretentious building was begun as the Presidential Palace and wound up as the home of a bank. But there are bullet marks on the façade of the *Museo Nacional*, and there is still an empty pedestal here and there throughout the city where the heroes of last year's revolution, in bronze, have been pulled down and the heroes of this year's uprising of the people have not yet been set up. Red tiled roofs give the city color, and the varying shades of its populace give it variety, and the fact that below the whiter class of inhabitants *Guarani* is spoken instead of Spanish adds to the individuality of its effect.

But the house into which the carriage turned could

have been built in Rio or Buenos Aires without comment on its architecture. It had the outer bleakness of most private homes of South America, but if it was huge and its windows were barred, the patio into which Bell was ushered by a bewildered and suspicious major-domo made up in color and in charm for all that the exterior lacked.

A fountain played amid flowers, and macaws and parrots and myriad other caged birds hung in their cages about the colonnade around the court, and Bell found Paula being introduced to a pale young man in the stiff collar and unspeakably formal morning clothes of the South American who is of the upper class.

"Jaime," said Isabella, beaming. "And this is Charles, whom Paula is to marry! It is romantic! It is fascinating! And I depend on you to give him clothes so that all our servants won't stare goggle-eyed at him, and I am going to take Paula off at once and dress her! They are our guests! And, Jaime, you must threaten all the servants terribly so they will keep it very secret—that we have two such terrible people

with us."

Paula smiled at Bell, and he saw that she felt utterly safe and wholly at peace. Something was hammering at Bell's brain, warning him, and he could not understand what it was. But he exchanged the decorous limp handshake which is conventional south of Panama, and followed his unsmiling host to rooms where a servant laid out a bewildering assortment of garments. They were all rather formal, the sort of clothing that is held to be fitting for a man of position where Spanish is the official if not the common tongue.

His host retired, without words, and Bell came out later to find him sipping moodily at a drink, waiting for him. He wiped his forehead.

"Be seated, Señor," he said heavily, "until the ladies join us."

He wiped his forehead again and watched somberly while Bell poured out a drink.

"Isabella...." He seemed to find it difficult to speak.

"She has told me a little, but there has been no time for more than a little: I do not wish to have her tell me too much. She does not understand. She was educated in North America, where customs are different. She demands that I assist you and the senorita—it is the senorita?"

Bell stiffened. In all Spanish America the conventions are strict. For a man and woman to travel together, even perforce and for a short distance, automatically damns the woman.

"Go on," said Bell grimly.

His host was very pale indeed.

"She demands that I assist you and the senorita to escape the police and the government. Provided that you do not tell me who you are, I will attempt it. But —"

"I wonder," said Bell quietly, "if you have ever seen red spots dancing before your eyes."

His host went utterly livid.

Zuloaga looked down at his hands, as if expecting unguessable things of them. And then he shrugged, and said harshly:

"I have, Señor. So you see that Isabella, who does not know, is asking me to risk, not only my life, but her honor."

Bell said nothing for a moment. He was a little pale.

"And your honor?" he asked quietly.

The pallor on the face of the Señor Jaime Zuloaga was horrible. He tried to speak, and could not. He stood up, and managed to say:

"So much I will risk, because you have been my guest. Until to-morrow morning you are safe, unless the Señor Francia has his spies within my own house. I—I will attempt, even to procure a boat. But—"

Something made Bell turn. The major-domo was

moving quickly out of sight. Like a flash Bell was upon him, and like a flash a knife came out.

Bell's host gasped. The fact that his servant had spied was more than obvious, and he had spoke treason against The Master. He leaned against the table, sick and trembling and mumbling of despair, while there were crashes in the room into which Bell had plunged, while bodies thrashed about on the floor, and while stertorous breathing grew less, and stopped....

Bell came back, breathing hard. The front of his coat was slashed open.

"He's dead," he said harshly. "He'd have reported what you said, so I killed him.... And now we've got to do something with his body."

He helped in the horrible task, while his host grew more and more shaken. No other servants came near. And Bell could almost read the thoughts that went through Zuloaga's brain. One servant had spied, to report his treason. And that meant assassination for

himself, as the least of punishments, and for his wife....

But there would be no punishment if he went first to the deputy and said that Bell had killed the major-domo.

Bell left the house before dusk, desperately determined to steal a craft of some sort, return for Paula, and get away from Asunción before dawn.

He returned after an hour. In the morning a man would be found bound and gagged, with five hundred pesos stuffed into his pockets. His boat would have vanished.

But there was a commotion before the house where Paula waited fearfully. A carriage stood there, with a company of mounted soldiers about it. Someone was being put into it. As Bell broke into a run toward the house the carriage started up and the soldiers trotted after it.

Paula was taken.

CHAPTER 13

That night Bell turned burglar. To attempt a rescue of Paula was simply out of the question. He was entirely aware that he would be expected to do just such a thing, and that it would be adequately guarded against. Therefore he prepared for a much more desperate enterprise by burglarizing a bookstore in the particularly neat method in which members of The Trade are instructed. The method was invented by a member of The Trade who was an ex-cabinet maker, and who perished disreputably. He killed a certain courier of a certain foreign government, thereby preventing a minor war and irritating two governments excessively, and was hanged.

The method, of course, is simplicity itself. One removes the small nails which hold the molding of a door panel in place. The molding comes out. So does the panel. One enters through the panel, commits one's burglary, and comes out, replacing the molding and the nails with reasonable care. Depending upon the care with which the replacing is done, the means of entrance is more or less undiscoverable. But it is

usually used when it is not intended that the burglary ever be discussed.

Bell abstracted two books, wrapping paper and twine. He departed, using great care. He walked three miles out of town and to the banks of the Paraguay. There he carefully saturated the pages of both books in water, carefully keeping the bindings from being wetted. Then he tore one book to pieces, saving the leaves and inserting them between the leaves of the other book. Then, with a brazil nut candle for illumination, he began to write.

You see, when two thoroughly wetted pieces of paper are placed one above the other with a hard surface such as the cover of another book under them, you can write upon the top one with a stick. The writing will show dark against the gray of the saturated paper. You then remove the top sheet and end the writing reproduced on the bottom sheet. And then you can dry the second sheet and find the marking vanished—until it is wetted again. It is, in fact, a method of water-marking paper. And it is the simplest of all methods of invisible writing.

Bell wrote grimly for hours. The book he had chosen was an old one, an ancient copy of one of Lope de Vega's plays, and the pages were wrinkled and yellow from age alone. When, by dawn, the last page was dried out, there was no sign that anything other than antiquity had affected the paper. And Bell wrapped it carefully, and addressed it to an elderly senora of literary tastes in San Juan, Porto Rico, and enclosed an affectionate letter to his very dear aunt, and signed it with an entirely improbable name.

It was mailed before sunrise, the necessary stamps having been filched from the burglarized bookstore and the price thereof being carefully inserted in the till. Bell had made a complete and painstaking report of every fact he had himself come upon in the matter of The Master and his slaves and appended to it a copy of the report of the dead Secret Service operative Number One-Fourteen. He destroyed that after copying it. And he concluded that since he had been given dismissal by Jamison in Rio, he considered himself at liberty to take whatever steps he saw fit. And since the Senhorina Paula Canalejas had been

kidnapped by agents of The Master, he intended to take steps which might possibly bring about her safety, but would almost certainly cause his death.

The report should at least be of assistance if the Trade set to work to combat The Master. Bell had no information whatever about that still mysterious and still more horrible person himself. But what he knew about The Master's agents he sent to a lady in Porto Rico who has an astonishingly large number of far ranging nephews. And then Bell got himself adequately shaved, bought a hearty breakfast, and, after one or two heartening drinks, was driven grandly to the residence of the Señor Francia, deputy of The Master for the republic of Paraguay.

The servants who admitted him gazed blankly when he gave his name. A door was hastily closed behind him. He was ushered into an elaborate reception room and, after an agitated pause, no less than six separate frock-coated persons appeared and pointed large revolvers at him while a seventh searched him exhaustively. Bell submitted amusedly.

"And now," he said dryly, "I suppose the Señor Francia will receive me?"

There was more agitation. The six men remained; with their weapons pointed at him. The seventh departed, and Bell re-dressed himself in a leisurely fashion.

Ten minutes later a slender, dark skinned man with impeccably waxed moustaches entered, regarded Bell with an entirely impersonal interest, took one of the revolvers from one of the six frock-coated gentlemen, and seated himself comfortably. He waved his hand and they filed uneasily from the room. So far, not one word had been spoken.

Bell retrieved his cigarette case and lighted up with every appearance of ease.

"I have come," he said casually, "to request that I be sent to The Master. I believe that he is anxious to meet me."

The dark eyes scrutinized him coldly. Then Francia

smiled.

"*Pero si*," he said negligently, "he is very anxious to see you. I suppose you know what fate awaits you?"

His smile was amiable and apparently quite friendly, but Bell shrugged.

"I suppose," he said dryly, "he wants to converse with me. I have been his most successful opponent to date, I think."

Francia smiled again. It was curious how his smile, which at first seemed so genuine and so friendly, became unspeakably unpleasant on its repetition.

"Yes." Francia seemed to debate some matter of no great importance. "You have been very annoying, Señor Bell. The Senhor Ribiera asked that you be sent to him. It was his intention to execute you, privately. He described a rather amusing method to me. And I must confess that you have annoyed me, likewise. Since the Cuyaba plantation was destroyed my subjects have been much upset. They have been

frightened, and even stubborn. Only last week"—he smiled pleasantly, and the effect was horrible—"only last week I desired the society of a lady who is my subject. And her husband considered that, since the *fazenda* was destroyed, The Master would be powerless to extend his grace before long, in any event. So he shot his wife and himself. It annoyed me enough to make me feel that it would be a pleasure to kill you."

He raised the revolver meditatively.

"Well?" said Bell coldly.

Francia lowered the weapon and laughed.

"Oh, I shall not do it. I think The Master would be displeased. You seem to have the type of courage he most desires in his deputies. And it may yet be that I shall greet you as my fellow deputy or perhaps my fellow viceroy. So I shall send you to him. I would say that you have about an even chance of dying very unpleasantly or of being a deputy. Therefore I offer you such courtesies as I may."

Bell puffed a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling.

"I'm about out of cigarettes," he said mildly.

"They shall be supplied. And—er—if you would desire feminine society, I will have some of my pretty subjects...."

"No," said Bell bluntly. "I would like to speak to the Senhorina Canalejas, though."

Francia chuckled.

"She left for Buenos Aires last night. The Senhor Ribiera sent a most impatient message for her to be sent on at once. I regretted it, but he had The Master's authority. I thought her charming, myself."

The skin about Bell's knuckles was white. His hands had clenched savagely.

"In that event," he said coldly, "the only other courtesy I would ask is that of following her as soon as possible."

Francia rose languidly. The revolver dangled by his side, but his grip upon it was firm. He smiled at Bell with the same effect of a horrible, ghastly geniality.

"Within the hour, Señor," he said urbanely. "With the guard I shall place over you it is no harm, I am sure, to observe that The Master is at his retreat in Punta Arenas. You will go there to-morrow, as I go to-night."

He moved toward the door, and smiled again, and added pleasantly:

"The Senhorina was delivered to the Senhor Ribiera this morning."

Matters moved swiftly after that. A servant brought cigarettes and a tray of liquors—which Bell did not touch. There was the sound of movement, the scurrying, furtive haste which seems always to imply a desperate sort of fear. Bell waited in a terrible calmness, while rage hammered at his temples.

Then the clattering of horses' hoofs outside. A carriage was being brought. Soldiers came in and a

man beckoned curtly. Bell stuffed his pockets with smokes and followed languidly. He was realizing that there was little pretense of secrecy about the power of The Master's deputy here. Police and soldiers.... But Paraguay, of all the nations of the southern continent, has learned a certain calm realism about governmental matters.

The man who has power is obeyed. The man who has not power is not obeyed. Titles are of little importance, though it is the custom for the man with the actual power eventually to assume the official rank of authority. Since the President in Asunción was no more than a figurehead who called anxiously upon the Señor Francia every morning for instructions concerning the management of the nation, Francia indifferently ignored him whenever he chose and gave orders directly. There would be very little surprise and no disorder whatever when The Master proclaimed Paraguay a viceroyalty of his intended empire.

The carriage went smartly through the cobbled streets with a cavalry escort all about it. An officer sat

opposite Bell with his hand on his revolver.

"I am receiving at least the honors of royalty," Bell commented coldly to him, in Spanish.

"Señor," said the officer harshly, "this is the state in which the deputies of The Master were escorted."

He watched Bell heavily, but with the desperate intentness of a man who knows no excuses will be received if his prisoner escapes.

Out of the town to a flying field, where a multi-engined plane was warming up. It was one of the ships that had been at The Master's *fazenda* of Cuyaba, one of the ships that had fled from the burning plantation. Bell was ushered into it with a ceremonious suspicion. Almost immediately he was handcuffed to his seat. Two men took their place behind him. The big ship rolled forward, lifted, steadied, and after a single circling set out to the southeast for Buenos Aires.

The whole performance had been run off with the

smoothly oiled precision of an iron discipline exercised upon men in the grip of deadly fear.

"One man, at least," reflected Bell grimly, "has some qualities that fit him for his job."

And then, for hour after hour, the big ship went steadily southeast. It flew over Paraguayan territory for two hours, soaring high over the Lago Ypoa and on over the swampy country that extends to the Argentine border. It ignored that border and all customs formalities. It went on, through long hours of flight, while mountains rose before it. It rose over those mountains and passed over the first railroad line—the first real sign of civilization since leaving Asunción—at Mercedes, and reached the Uruguay river where the Mirinjay joins it. It went roaring on down above the valley of the Rio Uruguay for long and tedious hours more. At about noon, lunch was produced. The two men who guarded Bell ate. Then, with drawn revolvers, they unlocked his handcuffs and offered him food.

He ate, of exactly those foods he had seen them eat.

He submitted indifferently to the re-application of his fetters. He had reached a state which was curiously emotionless. If Paula had been turned over to Ribiera that morning, Paula was dead. And just as there is a state of grief which stuns the mind past the realization of its loss, so there is a condition of hatred which leads to an enormous calmness and an unnatural absence of any tremor. Bell had reached that state. The instinct of self-preservation had gone lax. Where a man normally thinks first, if unconsciously, of the protection of his body from injury or pain, Bell had come to think first, and with the same terrible clarity, of the accomplishment of revenge.

He would accept The Master's terms, if The Master offered them. He would become The Master's subject, accepting the poison of madness without a qualm. He would act and speak and think as a subject of The Master, until his opportunity came. And then....

His absolute calmness would have deceived most men. It may have deceived his guards. Time passed. The Rio de la Plata spread out widely below the

roaring multi-engined plane and the vast expanse of buildings which is Buenos Aires appeared far ahead in the gathering dusk. Little twinkling lights blinked into being upon the water and the earth far away. Then one of the two guards touched Bell on the shoulder.

"Señor," he said sharply above the motors' muffled roar, "we shall land. A car will draw up beside the plane. There will be no customs inspection. That has been arranged for. You can have no hope of escape. I ask you if you will go quietly into the car?"

"Why not?" asked Bell evenly. "I went to Señor Francia of my own accord."

The guard leaned back. The city of Buenos Aires spread out below them. The tumbled, congested old business quarter glittered in all its offices, and the broad Avenida de Mayo cut its way as a straight slash of glittering light through the section of the city to eastward. By contrast, from above, the far-flung suburbs seemed dark and somber.

The big plane roared above the city, settling slowly;

banked steeply and circled upon its farther side, and dipped down toward what seemed an absurdly small area, which sprang into a pinkish glow on their descent. That area spread out as the descent continued, though, and was a wide and level field when the ship flattened out and checked and lumbered to a stop.

A glistening black car came swiftly, humming into place alongside almost before the clumsy aircraft ceased to roll. Its door opened. Two men got out and waited. The hangars were quite two hundred yards away, and Bell saw the glitter of weapons held inconspicuously but quite ready.

He stepped out of the cabin of the plane with a revolver muzzle pressing into his spine. Other revolver muzzles pressed sharply into his sides as he reached earth.

Smiling faintly, he took four steps, clambered up into the glistening black car, and settled down comfortably into the seat. The two men who had waited by the car followed him. The door closed, and Bell was in a

padded silence that was acutely uncomfortable for a moment. A dome light glowed brightly, however, and he lighted nearly the last of the cigarettes from Asunción with every appearance of composure as the car started off with a lurch.

The windows were blank. Thick, upholstered padding covered the spaces where openings should have been, and there was only the muffled vibration of the motor and the occasional curiously distinct noise of a flexing spring.

"Just as a matter of curiosity," said Bell mildly, "what is the excuse given on the flying field for this performance? Or is the entire staff subject to The Master?"

Two revolvers were bearing steadily upon him and the two men watched him with the unwavering attention of men whose lives depend upon their vigilance.

"You, Señor," said one of them without expression or a smile, "are the corpse of a prominent politician who died yesterday at his country home."

And then for half an hour or more the car drove swiftly, and stopped, and drove swiftly forward again as if in traffic. Then there were many turns, and then a slow and cautious traverse of a relatively few feet. It stopped, and then the engine vibration ceased.

"I advise you, Señor," said the same man who had spoken before, and in the same emotionless voice, "not to have hope of escape in the moment of alighting. We are in an enclosed court and there are two gates locked behind us."

Bell shrugged as there was the clatter of a lock operating. The door swung wide.

He stepped down into a courtyard surrounded by nearly bare walls. It had once been the *patio* of a private home of some charm. Now, however, it was bleak and empty. A few discouraged flowers grew weedily in one corner. The glow of light in the sky overhead assured Bell that he was in the very heart of Buenos Aires, but only the most subdued of rumbles spoke of the activity and the traffic of the city going on without.

"This way," said the man with the expressionless voice.

The other man followed. The chauffeur of the car stood aside as if some formality required him neither to start the motor or return to his seat until Bell was clear of the courtyard.

Through a heavy timber door. Along a passageway with the odor of neglect. Up stairs which once had been impressive and ornamental. Into a room without windows.

"You will have an interview with the Señorita Canalejas in five minutes," said the emotionless voice.

The door closed, while Bell found every separate muscle in his body draw taut. And while his brain at first was dazed with incredulous relief, then it went dark with a new and ghastly terror.

"They know *yagué*," he heard himself saying coldly, "which makes any person obey any command. They may know other and more hellish ones yet."

He fought for self control, which meant the ability to conceal absolutely any form of shock that might await him. That one was in store he was certain. He paced grimly the length of the room and back again....

Something on the carpet caught his eye. A bit of string. He stared at it incredulously. The end was tied into a curious and an individual knot, which looked like it might be the pastime of a sailor, and which looked like it ought to be fairly easy to tie. But it was one of those knots which wandering men sometimes tie absent mindedly in the presence of stirring events. It was the recognition-knot of the Trade, one of those signs by which men may know each other in strange and peculiar situations. And there were many other knots tied along the trailing length of the string. It seemed as if some nervous and distraught prisoner in this room might have toyed abstractedly with a bit of cord.

Only, Bell drew it through his fingers. Double knot, single knot, double knot.... They spelled out letters in the entirely simple Morse code of the telegrapher, if one noticed.

"RBRA GN ON PLA HRE ST TGT J."

Your old-time telegrapher uses many abbreviations. Your short-wave fan uses more. Mostly they are made by a simple omission of vowels in normal English words. And when the recognition sign at the beginning was considered, the apparently cryptic letters leaped into meaning.

"RiBeRA GoNe ON PauLA HeRe SiT TiGhT Jamison."

When the door opened again and a terribly pale Paula was ushered in, Bell gave no sign of surprise. He simply took her in his arms and kissed her, holding her very, very close.

CHAPTER 14

Paula remained in the room with Bell for perhaps twenty minutes, and Bell had the feeling of eyes upon them and of ears listening to their every word. In their first embrace, in fact, he murmured a warning in her ear and she gasped a little whispered word of comprehension. But it was at least a relief to be sure that she was alive and yet unharmed. Francia had been in error when he told Bell of Paula's delivery to

the Brazilian to be enslaved or killed as Ribiera found most amusing. Or perhaps, of course, Francia had merely wanted to cause Bell all possible discomfort.

It was clear, however, blessedly clear and evident, that Paula's pallor was due to nothing more than terror—a terror which was now redoubled because Bell was in The Master's toils with her. Forgetting his warning, she whispered to him desperately that he must try to escape, somehow, before The Master's poison was administered to him. Outside, he might do something to release her. Here, a prisoner, he was helpless.

Bell soothed her, not daring either to confess the plan he had formed of a feigned submission in order to wreak revenge, or to offer encouragement because of the message knotted in the piece of string by Jamison. And because of that caution she came to look at him with a queer doubt, and presently with a terrible quiet grief.

"Charles—you—you have been poisoned like the rest?"

The feeling of watching eyes and listening ears was strong. Bell had a part to play, and the necessity for playing that part was the greater because now he was forced to hope. He hesitated, torn between the need to play his rôle for the invisible eavesdroppers and the desire to spare Paula.

Her hand closed convulsively upon his.

"V-very well, Charles," she said quietly, though her lips quivered. "If—if you are going to serve The Master, I—I will serve him too, if he will let me stay always near you. But if he—will not, then I can always—die...."

Bell groaned. And the door opened silently, and there were men standing without. An emotionless voice said:

"Señorita, the Señor Ortiz will interview the Señor Bell."

"I'm coming," said Paula quietly.

She went, walking steadily. Two men detached themselves from the group about the door and followed her. The others waited for Bell. And Bell clenched his hands and squared his shoulders and marched grimly with them.

Again long passages, descending to what must have been a good deal below the surface of the earth. And then a massive door was opened, and light shone through, and Bell found himself standing on a rug of the thickest possible pile in a room of quite barbaric luxury, and facing a desk from which a young man was rising to greet him. This young man was no older than Bell himself, and he greeted Bell in a manner in which mockery was entirely absent, but in which defiance was peculiarly strong. A bulky, round shouldered figure wrote laboriously at a smaller desk to one side.

"Señor Bell," said the young man bitterly, "I do not ask you to shake hands with me. I am Julio Ortiz, the son of the man you befriended upon the steamer *Almirante Gomez*. I am also, by the command of The Master, your jailer. Will you be seated?"

Bell's eyes flickered. The older Ortiz had died by his own hand in the first stages of the murder madness The Master's poison produced. He had died gladly and, in Bell's view, very gallantly. And yet his son.... But of course The Master's deputies made a point of enslaving whole families when it was at all possible. It gave a stronger hold upon each member.

"I beg of you," said young Ortiz bitterly, "to accept my invitation. I wish to offer you a much qualified friendship, which I expect you to refuse."

Bell sat down and crossed his knees. He lit a cigarette thoughtfully, thinking swiftly.

"I remember, and admired, your father," he said slowly. "I think that any man who died as bravely as he did is to be envied."

The younger Ortiz had reseated himself as Bell sat down, and now he fingered nervously, wretchedly, the objects on his desk. A penholder broke between his fingers and he flung it irritably into the wastebasket.

"You understand," he said harshly, "the obligations upon me. I am the subject of The Master. You will realize that if you desire to escape, I cannot permit it. But you did my father a very great kindness. Much of it I was able to discover from persons on the boat. More, from the wireless operator who is also the subject of The Master. You were not acting, Señor, as a secret service operative in your attempt to help my father. You bore yourself as a very honorable gentleman. I wish to thank you."

"I imagine," said Bell dryly, "that anyone would have done what I did."

He seemed to be quite at ease, but he was very tense indeed. The bulky, round shouldered figure at the other desk was writing busily with a very scratchy pen. It was an abominable pen. Its sputtering was loud enough to be noticeable under any circumstances, but Bell was unusually alert, just now, and suddenly he added still more drily:

"Helping a man in trouble is quite natural. One always gets it back. It's a sort of dealing with the

future in which there is a profit on every trade."

He put the slightest emphasis on the last word and waited, looking at young Ortiz, but listening with all his soul to the scratching of the pen. And that scratching sound ceased abruptly. The pen seemed to write smoothly all of an instant. Bell drew a deep breath of satisfaction. In the Trade, when in doubt, one should use the word "Trade" in one's first remark to the other man. Then the other man will ask your trade, and you reply impossibly. It is then up to the other man to speak frankly, first. But circumstances alter even recognition-signs.

Ortiz had not noticed any by-play, of course. It would have been rather extraordinary if he had. A pen that scratches so that the sound is Morse code for "Bell, play up. J." is just unlikely enough to avoid all notice.

Ortiz drummed upon the desk. "Now, Señor, what can I do that will serve you? I cannot release you. You know that. I am not the deputy here. There has been a set-back to The Master's plans and all the deputies are called to his retreat to receive instructions and to

discuss. I have merely been ordered to carry out the deputy's routine labors until he returns. However, I will be obeyed in any matter. I can, and will, do anything that will make you more comfortable or will amuse you, from a change in your accommodations to providing you with companions. You observe," he added with exquisite bitterness, "that the limit of my capacity to prove my friendship is to offer my services as a pander."

Bell gazed at the tip of his cigarette, letting his eyes wander about the room for an instant, and permitting them to rest for the fraction of a second upon the round shouldered, writing form by the side wall.

"I am sufficiently amused," he said mildly. "I asked to be sent to The Master. He intends to make me an offer, I understand. Or he did. He may have changed his mind. But I am curious. Your father told me a certain thing that seemed to indicate he did not enjoy the service of The Master. Your tone is quite loyal, but unhappy. Why do you serve him? Aside, of course, from the fact of having been poisoned by his deputy."

Internally, Bell was damning Jamison feverishly. If he was to play up to Ortiz, why didn't Jamison give him some sign of how he was to do it? Some tip....

"Herr Wiedkind," said Ortiz wearily, "perhaps you can explain."

The round shouldered figure swung about and bowed profoundly to Bell.

"Der Señor Ortiz," he said gutturally, and in a sepulchral profundity, "he does not understand himself. I haff nefer said it before. But he serfs Der Master because he despairs, andt he will cease to serf Der Master when he hopes. And I—I serf Der Master because I hope, andt I will cease to serf him when I despair."

Ortiz looked curiously and almost suspiciously at the Germanic figure which regarded him soberly through thick spectacles.

"It is not customary, Herr Wiedkind," he said slowly, "to speak of ceasing to serve The Master."

"Idt is not customary to speak of many necessary things," said the round shouldered figure dryly. "Of our religions, for example. Of der women we lofe. Of our gonsciences. Of various necessary biological functions. But in der presence of der young man who is der enemy of Der Master we can speak freely, you and I who serf him. We know that maybe der deputies serf because they enjoy it. But der subjects? Dey serf because dey fear. Andt fear is intolerable. A man who is afraid is in an unstable gondition. Sooner or later he is going to stop fearing because he gets used to it—when Der Master will haff no more hold on him—or else he is going to stop fearing because he will kill himself."

To an outsider the spectacle of the three men in their talk would have been very odd indeed. Two men who served The Master, and one who had been his only annoying opponent, talking of the service of The Master quite amicably and without marked disagreement.

Ortiz stirred and drummed nervously on the desk. The round shouldered figure put the tips of its fingers

together.

"How did you know," demanded Ortiz suddenly, "that I serve because I despair?"

Bell watched keenly. He began to see where the talk was trending, and waited alertly for the moment for him to speak. This was a battlefield, this too luxurious room in which young Ortiz seemed an alien. Rhetoric was the weapon which now would serve the best.

"Let us talk frankly," said the placid German voice. "You andt I, Señor Ortiz, haff worked together. You are not a defil like most of the deputies, and I do not regret hafing been sent here to help you. And I am not a scoundtrel like most of those who help the deputies, so you haff liked me a little. Let us talk frankly. I was trapped. I am a capable segretary. I speak seferal languages. I haff no particular ambitions or any loyalties. I am useful. So I was trapped. But you, Señor Ortiz, you are different."

Ortiz suddenly smiled bitterly.

"It is a saying in Brazil, if I recall the words, '*A cauda do demonio e de rendas*.' 'The devil's tail is made of lace.' That is the story."

Bell said quietly:

"No."

Ortiz stared at him. He was very pale. And suddenly he laughed without any amusement whatever.

"True," said Ortiz. He smiled in the same bitterness. "I had forgotten. I am a slave, and the Herr Wiedkind is a slave, and you, Señor Bell, are the enemy of our master. But I had forgotten that we are gentlemen. In the service of The Master one does forget that there are gentlemen."

He laughed again and lighted a cigarette with hands that shook a little.

"I loved a girl," he said in a cynical amusement. "It is peculiar that one should love any woman, *señores*—or do you, Señor Bell, find it natural? I loved this girl. It

pleased my father. She was of a family fully equal to my own: their wealth, their position, their traditions were quite equal, and it was a most suitable match. Most remarkable of all, I loved her as one commonly loves only when no such considerations exist. It is amusing to me now, to think how deeply, and how truly, and how terribly I loved her...."

Young Ortiz's pallor deepened as he smiled at them. His eyes, so dark as to be almost black, looked at them from a smiling mask of whiteness.

"There was no flaw anywhere. A romance of the most romantic, my father very happy, her family most satisfied and pleased, and I—I walked upon air. And then my father suddenly departed for the United States, quite without warning. He left a memorandum for me, saying that it was a matter of government, a secret matter. He would explain upon his return. I did not worry. I haunted the house of my fiancée. The habits of her family are of the most liberal. I saw her daily, almost hourly, and my infatuation grew. And suddenly I grew irritable and saw red spots before my eyes....

"Her father took me to task about my nervousness. He led me kindly to a man of high position, who poured out for me a little potion.... And within an hour all my terrible unease had vanished. And then they told me of The Master, of the poison I had been given in the house of my fiancée herself. They informed me that if I served The Master I would be provided with the antidote which would keep me sane. I raged.... And then the father of my fiancée told me that he and all his family served The Master. That the girl I loved, herself, owed him allegiance. And while I would possibly have defied them and death itself, the thought of that girl not daring to wed me because of the poison in her veins.... I saw, then, that she was in terror. I imagined the two of us comforting each other beneath the shadow of the most horrible of fates...."

Ortiz was silent for what seemed to be a long time, smiling mirthlessly at nothing. When his lips parted, it was to laugh, a horribly discordant laughter.

"I agreed," he said in ghastly amusement. "For the sake of my loved one, I agreed to serve The Master that I might comfort her. And plans for our wedding,

which had been often and inexplicably delayed, were set in train at once. And the deputy of The Master entertained me often. I plied him with drink, striving to learn all that I could, hoping against hope that there would be some way of befooling him and securing the antidote without the poison.... And at last, when very drunken, he laughed at me for my intention of marriage. He advised me tipsily to serve The Master zealously and receive promotion in his service. Then, he told me amusedly, I would not care for marriage. My fiancée would be at my disposal without such formalities. In fact—while I stood rigid with horror—he sent a command for her to attend him immediately. He commanded me to go to an apartment in his dwelling. And soon—within minutes, it seemed—the girl I loved came there to me...."

Bell did not move. This was no moment to interrupt. Ortiz's fixed and cynical smile wavered and vanished. His voice was harsh.

"She was at my disposal, as an act of drunken friendship by the deputy of The Master. She confessed to me, weeping, that she had been at the disposal of

the deputy himself. Of any other person he cared to divert or amuse.... Oh! *Dios!*"

Ortiz stopped short and said, in forced calmness:

"That also was the night that my father died."

Silence fell. Bell sat very still. The Teutonic figure spoke quietly after the clock had ticked for what seemed an interminable period.

"You didnt know, then, that your father's death was arranged?"

Ortiz turned stiffly to look at him.

"Here," said the placid voice, quaintly sympathetic.

"Look at these."

A hand extended a thick envelope. Ortiz took it, staring with wide, distended eyes. The round shouldered figure stood up and seemed to shake itself. The stoop of its shoulders straightened out. One of the seemingly pudgy hands reached up and

removed the thick spectacles. A bushy gray eyebrow peeled off. A straggly beard was removed. The other eyebrow.... Jamison nodded briefly to Bell, and turned to watch Ortiz.

And Ortiz was reading the contents of the envelope. His hands began to shake violently. He rested them on the desk-top so that he could continue to read. When he looked up his eyes were flaming.

"The real Herr Wiedkind," said Jamison dryly, "came up from Punta Arenas with special instructions from The Master. You have talents, Señor Ortiz, which The Master wished to use. Also you have considerable wealth and the prestige of an honorable family. But you were afflicted with ideas of honor and decency, which are disadvantageous in deputies of The Master. The real Herr Wiedkind had remarkable gifts in eradicating those ideas."

Jamison sat down and crossed his knees carefully.

"I looked you up because I knew The Master had killed your father," he added mildly, "and I thought

you'd either be hunting The Master or he'd be hunting you. My name's Jamison. I killed the real Wiedkind and took his identification papers. He was a singularly unpleasant beast. His idea of pleasure made him seem a fatherly sort of person, very much like my make-up. He was constantly petting children, and appeared very benign. I am very, very glad that I killed him."

Ortiz tore at his collar, suddenly. He seemed to be choking.

"This—this says.... It is The Master's handwriting! I know it! And it says—"

"It says," Jamison observed calmly, "that since your father killed the previous deputy in an attempt to save you from The Master's poison, that you are to be prepared for the work your father had been assigned. Herr Wiedkind is given special orders about your—ah—moral education. In passing, I might say that your father was sent to the United States because it was known he'd killed the previous deputy. He told Bell he'd done that killing. And he was allowed to grow

horribly nervous on his return. He was permitted to see the red spots, because he was officially—even as far as you were concerned—to commit suicide.

"It was intended that his nervousness was to be noticed. And a plane tried to deliver a message to him. Your father thought the parcel contained the antidote to the poison that was driving him mad. Actually, it was very conventional prussic acid. Your father would have drunk it and dropped dead, a suicide, after a conspicuous period of nervousness and worry."

Bell felt his cigarette burning his fingers. He had sat rigid until the thing burned short. He crushed out the coal, looking at Ortiz.

And Ortiz seemed to gasp for breath. But with an almost superhuman effort he calmed himself outwardly.

"I—think," he said with some difficulty, "that I should thank you. I do. But I do not think that you told me all of this without some motive. I abandon the service of

The Master. But what is it that you wish me to do? You know, of course, that I can order both of you killed...."

Bell put down the stub of his cigarette very carefully.

"The only thing you can do," he said quietly, "is to die."

"True," said Ortiz with a ghastly smile. "But I would like my death to perform some service. The Master has no enemies save you two, and those of us who die on becoming his enemies. I would like, in dying, to do him some harm."

"I will promise," said Jamison grimly, "to see that The Master dies himself if you will have Bell and myself put in a plane with fuel to Punta Arenas and a reasonable supply of weapons. I include the Señorita Canalejas as a matter of course."

Ortiz looked from one to the other. And suddenly he smiled once more. It was queer, that smile. It was not quite mirthless.

"You were right, just now," he observed calmly, "when as the Herr Wiedkind you said that I would quit the service of The Master when I ceased to despair. I begin to have hopes. You two men have done the impossible. You have fought The Master, you have learned many of his secrets, and you have corrupted a man to treason when treason means suicide. Perhaps, Señores, you will continue to achieve the impossible, and assassinate The Master."

He stood up, and though deathly pale continued to smile.

"I suggest, Señor, that you resume your complexion. And you, Señor Bell, you will be returned to your confinement. I will make the necessarily elaborate arrangements for my death."

Bell rose. He liked this young man. He said quietly:

"You said just now you wouldn't ask me to shake hands. May I ask you?..." He added almost apologetically as Ortiz's fingers closed upon his: "You see, when your father died I thought that I would be

very glad if I felt that I would die as well. But I think"—he smiled wryly—"I think I'll have two examples to think of when my time comes."

In the morning a bulky, round shouldered figure entered the room in which Bell was confined.

"You will follow me," said a harsh voice.

Bell shrugged. He was marched down long passageways and many steps. He came out into the courtyard, where the glistening black car with the blank windows waited. At an imperious gesture, he got in and sat down with every appearance of composure, as of a man resignedly submitting to force he cannot resist. The thick spectacles of the Herr Wiedkind regarded him with a gogglelike effect. There was a long pause. Then the sound of footsteps. Paula appeared, deathly pale. She was ushered into the vehicle—and only Bell's swift gesture of a finger to his lips checked her cry of relief.

Voices outside. The guttural Spanish of the Herr Wiedkind. Other, emotionless voices replying. The

Herr Wiedkind climbed heavily into the car and sat down, producing a huge revolver which bore steadily upon Bell. The door closed, and he made a swift gesture of caution.

"Idt may be," said the Germanic voice harshly, "that you and the young ladty haff much to say to each other. But idt can wait. And I warn you, *mein Herr*, that at the first movement I shall fire."

Bell relaxed. There was the purring of the motor. The car moved off. Obviously there was some microphonic attachment inside the tonneau which carried every word within the locked vehicle to the ears of the two men upon the chauffeur's seat. An excellent idea for protection against treachery. Bell smiled, and moved so that his lips were a bare half-inch from Paula's ears.

"Try to weep, loudly," he said in the faintest of whispers. "This man is a friend."

But Paula could only stare at the bulky figure sitting opposite until he suddenly removed the spectacles,

and smiled dryly, and then reached in his pockets and handed Bell two automatic pistols, and extended a tiny but very wicked weapon to Paula. He motioned to her to conceal it.

Jamison—moving to make the minimum of noise—handed Bell a sheet of stiff cardboard. It passed into Bell's fingers without a rustle. He showed it silently to Paula.

We were overheard last night by someone. We don't know who or how much he heard. Dictaphone in the room we talked in. Can't find out who it was or what action he's taken. We may be riding into a trap now. Ortiz has disappeared. He may be dead. We can only wait and see.

The car was moving as if in city traffic, a swift dash forward and a sudden stop, and then another swift dash. But the walls within were padded so that no sound came from without save the faint vibration of the motor and now and then the distinct flexing of a spring. Then the car turned a corner. It went more rapidly. It turned another corner. And another....

In the light of the bright dome light, Bell saw beads of sweat coming out on Jamison's face. He did not dare to speak, but he formed words with his lips.

"He's turning wrong! This isn't the way to the field!"

Bell's jaws clenched. He took out his two automatics and looked at them carefully. And then, much too short a time from the departure for the flying field to have been reached, the car checked. It went over rough cobblestones, and Bell himself knew well that there had been no cobbled roadway between the flying field and his prison. And then the car went up a sort of ramp, a fairly steep incline which by the feel of the motor was taken in low, and on for a short distance more. Then the car stopped and the motor was cut off.

Keys rattled in the lock outside. The door opened. The blunt barrel of an automatic pistol peered in.

he door of the car swung wide, and Ortiz's pale grim face peered in behind the blue steel barrel of his automatic. He smiled queerly at Jamison, with a grunt

of relief, tapped Bell's wrist in sign to put away his weapon.

Bell has fought through tremendous obstacles to find and kill The Master, whose diabolical poison makes murder-mad snakes of the hands; and, as he faces the monster at last—his own hands start to writhe!

"Ah, very well," said Ortiz, with the same queer smile upon his face. "One moment."

He disappeared. On the instant there was the thunderous crashing of a weapon. Bell started up, but Jamison thrust him back. Then Ortiz appeared again with smoke still trickling from the barrel of his pistol.

"I have just done something that I have long wished to do," he observed coolly. "I have killed the chauffeur and his companion. You may alight, now. I believe we will have half an hour or more. It will do excellently."

He offered his hand to Paula as she stepped out. She seemed to shudder a little as she took it.

"I do not blame you for shuddering, Senorita," he said politely, "but men who are about to die may indulge in petty spites. And the chauffeur was a favorite with the deputy for whom I am substituting. Like all favorites of despots, he had power to abuse, and abused it. I could tell you tales, but refrain."

The car had come to a stop in what seemed to be a huge warehouse, and by the sound of water round about, it was either near or entirely built out over the harbor. A large section near the outer end was walled off. Boxes, bales, parcels and packages of every sort were heaped all about. Bell saw crated air engines lying in a row against one wall. There were a dozen or more of them. Machinery, huge cases of foodstuffs....

"The Buenos Aires depot," said Ortiz almost gaily. "This was the point of receipt for all the manufactured goods which went to the *fazenda* of Cuyaba, Senor Bell. Since you destroyed that place, it has not been so much used. However, it will serve excellently as a tomb. There are cases of hand grenades yonder. I advise you to carry a certain number with you. The machine guns for the air-craft, with their ammunition,

are here...."

He was hurrying them toward the great walled-off space as he talked, his automatic serving as a pointer when he indicated the various objects.

"Now, here," he added as he unlocked the door, "is your vessel. The Master bought only amphibian planes of late. Those for Cuyaba were assembled in this little dock and took off from the water. Your destruction up there, Senor Bell, left one quite complete but undelivered. I think another, crated, is still in the warehouse. I have been very busy, but if you can fuel and load it before we are attacked...."

They were in a roofed and walled but floorless shed, built into the warehouse itself. Water surged about below them, and on it floated a five passenger plane, fully assembled and apparently ready to fly, but brand new and so far unused.

"I'll look it over," said Bell, briefly. He swung down the catwalk painted on the wings. He began a swift and hasty survey. Soot on the exhaust stacks proved that

the motors had been tried, at least. Everything seemed trim and new and glistening in the cabin. The fuel tanks showed the barest trace of fuel. The oil tanks were full to their filling-plugs.

He swung back up.

"Taking a chance, of course," he said curtly. "If the motors were all right when they were tried, they probably are all right now. They may have been tuned up, and may not. I tried the controls, and they seem to work. For a new ship, of course, a man would like to go over it carefully, but if we've got to hurry...."

"I think," said Ortiz, and laughed, "that haste would be desirable. Herr Wiedkind—No! *Amigo mio*, it was that damned Antonio Calles who listened to us last night. I found pencil marks beside the listening instrument. He must have sat there and eavesdropped upon me many weary hours, and scribbled as men do to pass the time. He had a pretty taste in monograms.... I gave all the orders that were needful for you to take off from the flying field. I even went there myself and gave additional orders. And Calles

was there. Also others of The Master's subjects. My treason would provoke a terrible revenge from The Master, so they thought to prove their loyalty by permitting me to disclose my plan and foil it at its beginning.

"I would have made the journey with you to The Master, but as a prisoner with the tale of my treason written out. So I returned and changed the orders to the chauffeur, when all the Master's loyal subjects were waiting at the flying field. But soon it will occur to them what I have done. They will come here. Therefore, hasten!"

"We want food," said Bell evenly, "and arms, but mostly we want fuel. We'll get busy."

He shed his coat and picked up a hand-truck. He rammed it under a drum of gasoline and ran it to the walkway nearest to the floating plane. Coiled against the wall there was a long hose with a funnel at its upper end. In seconds he had the hose end in one of the wing fuel-tanks. In seconds more he had propped the funnel into place and was watching the gasoline

gurgling down the hose.

"Paula," he said curtly, "watch this. When it's empty roll the drum away so I can put another in its place."

She moved quickly beside it, throwing him a little smile. She set absorbedly about her task.

Jamison arrived with another drum of gas before the first was emptied, and Bell was there with a third while the second still gurgled. They heaped the full drums in place, and Jamison suddenly abandoned his truck to swear wrathfully and tear off his spectacles and fling them against the wall. The bushy eyebrows and beard peeled off. His coat went down. He began to rush loads of foodstuffs, arms, and other objects to a point from which they could be loaded on the plane. Ortiz pointed out the things he pantingly demanded.

In minutes, it seemed, he was demanding: "How much can we take? Any more than that?"

"No more," said Bell. "All the weight we can spare goes for fuel. See if you can find another hose and

funnel and get to work on the other tank. I'm going to rustle oil."

He came staggering back with heavy drums of it. A thought struck him.

"How do we get out? What works the harbor door?"

Ortiz pointed, smiling.

"A button, Senor, and a motor does the rest." He looked at his watch. "I had better see if my fellow subjects have come."

He vanished, smiling his same queer smile. Bell worked frantically. He saw Ortiz coming back, pausing to light a cigarette, and taking up a hatchet, with which he attacked a packing case.

"They are outside, Senor," he called. "They have found the signs of the car entering, and now are discussing."

He plucked something carefully from the packing box

and went leisurely back toward the door. Bell began to load the food and stores into the cabin, with sweat streaming down his face.

There was the sound of a terrific explosion, and Bell jumped savagely to solid ground.

"Keep loading! I'll hold them back!" he snapped to Jamison.

But when he went pounding to the back of the warehouse he found Ortiz laughing.

"A hand grenade, Senor," he said in wholly unnatural levity. "Among the subjects of The Master. I believe that I am going mad, to take such pleasure in destruction. But since I am to die so shortly, why not go mad, if it gives me pleasure?"

He peered out a tiny hole and aimed his automatic carefully. It spurted out all the seven shots that were left.

"The man who poisoned me," he said pleasantly. "I

think he is dead. Go back and make ready to leave, Senor Bell, because they will probably try to storm this place soon, and then the police will come, and then.... It is amusing that I am the one man to whom those enslaved among the city authorities would look for The Master's orders."

Bell stared out. He saw a small horde of people, frantically agitated, milling in the cramped and unattractive little street of Buenos Aires' waterfront. Sheer desperation seemed to impel them, desperation and a frantic fear. They surged forward—and Ortiz flung a hand grenade. Its explosion was terrific, but he had perhaps purposely flung it short. Bell suddenly saw police uniforms, fighting a way through to the front of the crowd and the source of all this disturbance.

"Go back," said Ortiz seriously. "I shall die, Senor Bell. There is nothing else for me to do. But I wish to die with Latin melodrama." He managed a smile. "I will give you ten minutes more. I can hold off the police themselves for so long. But you must hasten, because there are police launches."

He held out his hand. Bell took it.

"Good luck," said Ortiz.

"You can come—" began Bell, wrenched by the gaiety on Ortiz's face.

"Absurd," said Ortiz, smiling. "I should be murder mad within three days. This is a preferable death, I assure you. Ten minutes, no more!"

And Bell went racing back and found Jamison rolling away the last of the fuel drums and Paula looking anxiously for him.

"Tanks full," said Jamison curtly. "Everything set. What next?"

"Engines," said Bell.

He swung down and jerked a prop over. Again, and again.... The motor caught. He went plunging to the other. Minutes.... They caught. He throttled them down to the proper warming up roaring, while the air

in the enclosed space grew foul.

Once more to the warehouse. Ortiz shouted and waved his hand. He was filling his pockets with hand grenades. Bell made a gesture of farewell and Ortiz seemed to smile as he went back to hold the entrance for a little longer.

"We're going," said Bell grimly. "Get your guns ready, Jamison, for when the door goes up."

He pressed on the button Ortiz had pointed out. There were more explosions and the rattle of firearms from the front of the warehouse. There was a sudden rumble of machinery and the blank front of the little covered dock rose suddenly. The sunlit waters of Buenos Aires harbor spread out before them. To Bell, who had not looked on sunlight that day, the effect was dazzling. He blinked, and then saw a fast little launch approaching. There were uniformed figures crowded about its bows.

"All set!" he snapped. "I'm going to give her the gun."

"Go to it," said Jamison. "We're—"

The motors bellowed and drowned out the rest. The plane shuddered and began to move. The sound of explosions from the back of the warehouse was loud and continuous, now. Out into the bright sunlight the plane moved, at first heavily, then swiftly....

Bell saw arms waving wildly in the launch with the uniformed men. Sunlight glittered suddenly on rifle barrels. Puffs of vapor shot out. Something spat through the wall beside Bell. But the roaring of the motors kept up, and the pounding of the waves against the curved bow of the boat-body grew more and more violent.... Sweat came out on Bell's face. The ship was not lifting....

But it did lift. Slowly, very slowly, carrying every pound with which it could have risen from the water. It swept past the police launch at ninety miles an hour, but no more than five feet above the waves. A big, clumsy tramp flying the Norwegian flag splashed up river with its propeller half out of water. Bell dared to rise a little so he could bank and dodge it. He could

not rise above it.

He had one glimpse of blonde, astonished beards staring over the stern of the tramp as he swept by it, his wing tips level with its rail and barely twenty feet away. And then he went on and on, out to sea.

He began to spiral for height fully four miles offshore, and looked back at the sprawling city. Down by the waterfront a thick, curling mass of smoke was rising from one spot abutting on the water. It swayed aside and Bell saw the rectangular opening out of which the plane had come.

"Ortiz's in there," he said, sick at heart. "Dying as he planned."

But there was a sudden upheaval of timbers and roof. A colossal burst of smoke. A long time later the concussion of a vast explosion. There was nothing left where the warehouse had been.

Bell looked, and swore softly to himself, and felt a fresh surge of the hatred he bore to The Master and

all his works. And then filmy clouds loomed up but a little above the rising plane, and Bell shot into them and straightened out for the south.

For many long hours the plane floated on to southward, high above a gray ocean which seemed deceptively placid beneath a canopy of thin clouds. The motors roared steadily in the main, though once Bell instructed Jamison briefly in the maintenance of a proper course and height, and swung out into the terrific blast of air that swept past the wings. He clung to struts and handholds and made his way out on the catwalk to make some fine adjustment in one motor, with six thousand feet of empty space below the swaying wing.

"Carburetter wrong," he explained when he had closed the cabin window behind him again and the motors' roar was once more dulled. "It was likely to make a lot of carbon in the cylinders. O.K., now."

Paula's hand touched his shyly. He smiled abstractedly at her and went back to the controls.

And then the plane kept on steadily. Time and space have become purely relative in these days, in startling verification of Mr. Einstein, and the distance between Buenos Aires and Magellan Strait is great or small, a perilous journey or a mere day's travel, according to the mind and the transportation facilities of the voyager. Before four o'clock in the afternoon the coast was low and sandy to the westward, and it continued sterile and bare for long hours while the plane hung high against the sky with a following wind driving it on vastly more swiftly than its own engines could have contrived.

It was little before sunset when the character of the shore changed yet again, and the sun was low behind a bank of angry clouds when the stubby forefinger of rock that Magellan optimistically named the Cape of the Eleven Thousand Virgins reached upward from the seemingly placid water. Bell swept lower, then, much lower, looking for a landing place. He found it eight or nine miles farther on, on a wide sandy beach some three miles from a lighthouse. The little plane splashed down into tumbling sea and, half supported

by the waves and half by the lift remaining to its wings, ran for yards up upon the hard packed sand.

The landing had been made at late twilight, and Bell moved stiffly when he rose from the pilot's seat.

"I'm going over to that lighthouse," he said curtly.

"There won't be enough men there to be dangerous and they probably haven't frequent communication with the town. I'll learn something, anyway. You two stay with the plane."

Jamison lifted his eyebrows and was about to speak, but looked at Bell's expression and stopped.

Leadership is everywhere a matter of emotion and brains together, and though Jamison had his share of brains, he had not Bell's corroding, withering passion of hatred against The Master and all who served him gladly. All the way down the coast Bell had been remembering things he had seen of The Master's doing. His power was solely that of fear, and the deputies of his selection had necessarily been men who would spread that terror with an unholy zest. The nature of his hold upon his subjects was such that no

honorable man would ever serve him willingly, and for deputies he had need of men even of enthusiasm. His deputies, then, were men who found in the assigned authority of The Master full scope for the satisfaction of their own passions. And Bell had seen what those passions brought about, and there was a dull flame of hatred burning in his eyes that would never quite leave them until those men were powerless and The Master dead.

"You'll look after the ship and Paula," said Bell impatiently. "All right?"

Jamison nodded. Paula looked appealingly at Bell, but he had become a man with an obsession. Perhaps the death of Ortiz had cemented it, but certainly he was unable to think of anything, now, but the necessity of smashing the ghastly hold of The Master upon all the folk he had entrapped. Subconsciously, perhaps, Bell saw in the triumph of The Master a blow to all civilization. Less vaguely, he foresaw an attempt at the extension of The Master's rule to his own nation. But when Bell thought of The Master, mainly he remembered certain disconnected incidents. The girl

at Ribiera's luxurious *fazenda* outside of Rio, who had been ordered to persuade him to be her lover, on penalty of a horrible madness for her infant son if she failed. Of a pale and stricken *fazendiero* on the Rio Laurenço who thought him a deputy and humbly implored the grace of The Master for a moody twelve year old girl. Of a young man who kept his father, murder mad, in a barred room in his house and waited despairingly for that madness to be meted out upon himself and on his wife and children. Of a white man who had been kept in a cage in Cuyaba, with other men....

Bell trudged on through the deepening night with his soul a burning flame of hatred. He clambered amid boulders, guided by the tall lighthouse of Cape Possession with the little white dwelling he had seen at its base before nightfall. He fell, and rose, and forced his way on and upward, and at last was knocking heavily at a trim and neatly painted door.

He was so absorbed in his rage that his talk with the lighthouse keeper seemed vague in his memory, afterward. The keeper was a wizened little Welshman

from the Chibut who spoke English with an extraordinary mixture of a Spanish intonation and a Cimbrian accent. Bell listened heavily and spoke more heavily still. At the end he went back to the plane with a spindle-shanked boy with a lantern accompanying him.

"All settled," he said grimly, when Jamison came out into the darkness with a ready revolver to investigate the approaching light. "We get a boat from the lighthouse keeper to go to Punta Arenas in. He's a devout member of some peculiar sect, and he's seen enough of the hell Punta Arenas amounts to, to believe what I told him of its cause. His wife will look after Paula, and this boy will hitch a team to the plane and haul it out of sight early in the morning. With the help of God, we'll kill Ribiera and The Master before sunset to-morrow."

CHAPTER 16

But they did not kill The Master before nightfall. It was not quite practicable. Bell and Jamison started out well before dawn with a favorable wind and tide,

in the small launch the wizened Welshman placed at their disposal. His air was one of dour piety, but he accepted Bell's offer of money with an obvious relief, and criticized his Paraguayan currency with an acid frankness until Jamison produced Argentine pesos sufficient to pay for the boat three times over.

"I think," said Jamison dryly, "that Pau—that Miss Canalejas is safe enough until we come back. The keeper is a godly man and knows we have money. She'll be in no danger, except of her soul. They may try to save that."

Bell did not answer. He could think of nothing but the mission he had set himself. He tinkered with the engine to make it speed up, and set the sails with infinite care to take every possible advantage of the stiff breeze that blew. During the day, those sails proved almost as much of a nuisance as a help. The fiendish, sullen williwaws that blow furiously and without warning about the Strait required watching, and more than once it was necessary to reef everything and depend on the motor alone.

Bell watched the horizon ahead with smouldering eyes. Jamison watched him almost worriedly.

"Look here, Bell," he said at last, "you'll get nowhere feeling like you do. I know you've done The Master more damage than I have, but you'll just run your head into a trap unless you use your brains. For instance, you didn't ask about communications. There's a direct telegraph wire from Cape Virgins to Buenos Aires, and there's telephonic communication between the Cape and Punta Arenas. Do you imagine that the plane wasn't seen when it came in the Cape? And do you imagine The Master doesn't know we're here?"

Bell turned, then, and frowned blackly.

"I hadn't thought of it," he said grimly, "but I put some hand grenades in the locker, there."

"You damned fool!" said Jamison angrily. "Stop being bloodthirsty and use your head! You haven't even asked what I've done! I've done something, anyhow. That bundle I chucked in the bow has a couple of

sheepmen's outfits in it. Lots of sheep raised around here. We'll put 'em on before we land. And like a good general, I arranged a method of retreat before we left B. A. There'll be a naval vessel here in two or three days. She's carrying a party of Government scientists. She'll anchor in Punta Arenas harbor and announce a case of some infectious disease on board. No shore leave, you see, and nobody from shore permitted on board her. And she has one or two damned good analytical chemists with a damned good laboratory on board her, too. It's a long gamble, but if we can get hold of some of The Master's poison.... Do you see?"

"Yes," said Bell heavily. "I see. But you haven't been through what I've been through. What I've done, fighting that devil, has caused men to be deserted after being enslaved. There's one place, Cuyaba...."

His face twitched. That place was in his dreams, now. That place and others where human beings had watched their bodies go mad, and had been carried about screaming with horror at the crimes those bodies committed....

"I'm going to kill The Master," he rasped. "That's all."

He settled down to his grim watch for the city. All during the cloudy, overcast day he strained his eyes ahead. Jamison could make nothing of him. In the end he had to leave Bell to his moody waiting.

The morning passed, and midday, and a long afternoon. Three times Bell came restlessly back to the engine and tried to coax more speed out of it. But when darkness fell the town was still not in sight. They kept on, then, steering by the stars with the motor putt-putt-putting sturdily away in the stern. The water splashed and washed all about them. The little boat rose, and fell, and rose and fell again.

"That's the town," said Bell grimly.

It was eleven at night, or later. Lights began to appear, very far away, dancing miragelike on the edge of the water. They grew nearer with almost infinite slowness. Two wide bands of many lights, with a darker space in which a few much brighter lights showed clearly. Presently a single red light appeared,

the Punta Arenas harbor light, twenty-five feet up on an iron pole. They passed it.

"Bell," said Jamison curtly, "it's time you showed some sense, now. We're going to find out some things before we get reckless. This town isn't a big one, but it always was a hell on earth. No extradition from here. It's full of wanted men. It's dying, now, from the old days when all ships passed the Straits before the Panama Canal opened up, but it ought to be still a hell on earth. And we're going to put on these sheepmen outfits, and put up at some low caste sailors' and sheepmen's hotel on shore, and find out what is what. In the morning, if you like—"

"In the morning," said Bell coldly, "I'm going to settle with The Master."

They found a small and filthy hotel, in a still filthier street where the houses were alternately black and silent and empty, and filled with the squalid hilarity most seaport towns can somehow manage to support. The street lamps were white and cold. The dirt and squalor showed the more plainly by their light. There

were sailors from the few ships in harbor, and women so haggard and bedraggled that shrill laughter and lavish endearments remained their only allure. And Bell and Jamison plodded to the reeking place in which a half-drunk sheepman pointed, and there Bell sat grimly in the vermin infested room while Jamison, swearing wryly, went out.

He came back later, much later. His breath was strong of bad whiskey and he looked like a man who feels that a bath would be very desirable. He looked like a man who feels unclean.

"Give me a cigarette," he said shortly. "I found out most of what we want to know."

Bell gave him a cigarette and waited.

"Good thing you stayed behind," said Jamison. "I want to vomit. Why people go in hell holes for fun.... But I was very drunk and very amorous. Picked up a woman and fed her liquor. Young, too. Damnation! She got crying drunk and told me everything she knew. I gave her money and left. Punta Arenas is The

Master's, body and soul."

"One could have guessed it," said Bell grimly.

"Nothing like it is," said Jamison. "Every living creature, man, woman, and child, has been fed that devilish poison of his. The keepers of the dives go fawning to the local officials for the antidote. The *jefe politico* is driven in his carriage to be cured when red spots form before his eyes. The damned place is full of suicides, and women, and—oh, my God! It's horrible!"

A humming, buzzing noise set up off in the night somewhere. It kept up for a long time, throttled down. Suddenly it seemed to grow louder, changed in pitch, and dwindled as if into the far, far distance.

"That's one of The Master's planes now, no doubt," said Jamison savagely, "going off on some errand for him. He uses this place practically as an experiment station. The human beings here are his guinea pigs. The deputies get a standardized form of the stuff, but he's got it worked out in different doses so he can

make a man go mad in hours, if he chooses, instead of after a delay. I don't know how. And The Master—"

He checked himself sharply. There were shuffling footsteps in the hall outside. A timid tap on the door. Jamison opened it, while Bell dropped one hand inconspicuously to a weapon inside his shapeless clothing.

The toothless and filthy old man who kept the hotel beamed in at them.

"*Senores*," he cackled. "*Vdes son de Porvenir, no es verdad?*"

Jamison hiccupped, as one who has been out and been drunken ought to do.

"*No, viejo*," he rumbled tipsily, "*somos de la estancia del Señor Rubio. Vaya.*"

The old man seemed to mourn that they did not come from the sheep ranches about Porvenir Bay. But he produced a bottle with a shaking hand, still beaming.

"*Tengo muchos amigos en Porvenir,*" he chirped amiably. "*Y questa botella—*"

"*Démela,*" rumbled Jamison. He reached out his hand.

"*No mas que poquito!*" said the old man, beaming but anxious as Jamison tilted it to his lips. "*Es visky de gentes....*"

He beamed upon Bell, and Bell swallowed a spoonful and seemed to swallow vastly more. He lay back lazily while Jamison in the part of a tipsy shepherd bullied the old man amiably and eventually chased him out.

"You're amused?" asked Jamison sardonically, when there were no more sounds outside. "Because I said you didn't want to meet the young senorita who loved you when she saw you downstairs? Well, Bell, if you used your brain you didn't swallow any of that stuff."

Bell started up. Jamison caught him by the shoulder.

"I'm not sure," he said sharply. "Of course not. But it's

damned funny for a Spanish hotel keeper to give something for nothing, even when he seemed just to want to gossip about his friends. Here. Drink this water. It looks vile enough to take the place of mustard...."

Next morning the hotel keeper beamed upon them both as they went out of the place. A slatternly, dark haired girl who leaned on his shoulder smiled invitingly at Bell. And Bell, in his character of a loutish sheepman from one of the ranches that dot the shores of the Strait, grinned awkwardly back. But he went on with Jamison.

"We separate," said Jamison under his breath. "We want to find where The Master lives, mostly, and then we want to find the laboratory where his stuff is mixed. We don't want to do any killing until that's settled. After all, the Trade has something to say!"

Bell coddled indifferently and began to wander idly about the streets, turning here and there as if moved by nothing more than the vaguest curiosity. But gradually he was working through the sections in

which the larger buildings stood. Concrete structures, astonishingly modern, dotted the business section. But none of them had the air that would surround a place where a man with power of life or death would be. In a town the size of Punta Arenas there would be unmistakable evidences about The Master's residence, even if it were only that those who passed it did so hurriedly and with a twinge of fear.

There were prosperous men in plenty on the streets, mingled with deserting sailors, stockmen and farmers from the villages along the Strait, and even a few grimy men who looked like miners. But there is a lignite mine not far from the city, and a narrow gauge railroad running to it. Of the prosperous-seeming men, however, Bell picked out one here and there toward whom all passersby adopted a manner of cringing respect. Bell lounged against a pole and studied them thoughtfully. Men with an air of amused and careless scorn which only men with unlimited power may adopt. He saw one grossly fat man with hard and cruel eyes. The uniformed policemen drove all traffic abjectly out of the way of his carriage, and

stood with lifted hat until he had passed. The fat man gave no faintest sign of acknowledgment.

"I wonder," said Bell slowly, and very grimly, "if that's The Master?"

And then a passerby dodged quickly past his shoulder, brushing against him, and waited humbly in the street. Bell turned. A party of men were taking up nearly all the sidewalk. There were half a dozen of them in all. And nearly in the middle was the bulky, immaculate, pigmented Ribiera.

Bell stiffened. But to move, beyond clearing the way, would be to attract attention. He backed clumsily off the curbing as if making way....

And Ribiera looked at his face.

Bell's hand drifted near his hidden weapon. But Ribiera looked neither surprised nor alarmed. He halted and chuckled.

"Ah, the Senhor Bell!"

Bell said nothing, looking as stupid as possible, merely because there was nothing else to do.

"Ah, do not deny my acquaintance!" said Ribiera. He laughed. "I advise you to go and look at the view, over the harbor. Good day, Senhor Bell."

Laughing, he went off along the street. And Bell felt a cold horror creeping over him as he realized what Ribiera might mean. Ribiera had entirely too much against him to greet him only, in a town where even the dogs dared not bark without The Master's express command. He had guards with him, men who would have shot Bell down at a nod from Ribiera.

Bell burst into a mad run for the waterfront. When the bay spread out before his eyes he saw what Ribiera meant, and something seemed to snap in his brain.

The plane in which he and Jamison and Paula had escaped in was floating out in the harbor. It was unmistakable. A larger, bulkier seaplane floated beside it. The buzzing in the air the night before....

The arrival of the plane had been telephoned from Cape Virgins. Through a glass, perhaps, even its alighting had been watched. And a big seaplane had gone out to bring it back. Footprints in the sand would lead toward the lighthouse. There would be plenty of men to storm that, if necessary, to take the three fugitives. But they would have found only Paula. It was quite possible that the plane had only been sent for after Bell and Jamison had been seen to land in Punta Arenas. And Paula in The Master's hands would explain Ribiera's amusement perfectly.

Bell found Jamison looking unhurriedly for him. And Jamison glanced at his utterly white face and said softly:

"We want to get where we can't be seen, to talk. There's the devil to pay."

"No use hiding," said Bell. His lips seemed stiff.

"Paula—"

"Hide anyway," snapped Jamison. He fairly thrust Bell into an alleyway between two houses and thrust two

rounded objects beneath his loose fitting coat. "Two grenades. I have two more. The boat we came in is taken—"

"So is the plane," said Bell emotionlessly.

"And there is a sign, in English, posted where we tied it up. The sign says, '*The Senores Bell and Jamison may recover their boat on application to The Master, and may also receive news of a late traveling companion from him.*'"

"We're known," Bell told him—and amazingly found it possible to smile faintly—"Ribiera met me on the street and spoke to me and laughed and went on."

Jamison stared. Bell's manner was almost entirely normal again. Then Jamison shrugged.

"The sense of what you're saying," he observed wryly, "is that we're licked. Let us, then, go to see The Master. I confess I feel some curiosity to know just what he's like."

Bell was smiling. Being in an entirely abnormal state, he had a curious certitude of the proper course to adopt. He went up to a policeman and said politely, in Spanish:

"I am desired to report to The Master, himself. Will you direct me?"

The policeman abased himself instantly and trotted with them as a guide. And Bell walked naturally, now, with his head up and his shoulders back, and smoked leisurely as he went, and the policeman's abasement became abject. All who walked with that air of amused superiority in Punta Arenas were high in the service of The Master. Obviously, the two men in these dejected clothes must also be high in the service of The Master, and had adopted their disguise for purposes into which a mere policeman and a slave of The Master should not dare enquire.

Jamison was rather grim and still. Jamison thought he was walking to his death. But Bell smiled peculiarly and talked almost gaily and—as Jamison thought—almost irrationally.

They came to a house set in a fairly spacious lawn behind a rather high wall. There were greenhouses behind it, and there were flowers growing as well as any flowers can be expected to grow in such high altitudes. It was an extraordinarily cheerful dwelling to be found in Punta Arenas, but the shuddering fear with which the little policeman removed his hat as he entered the gateway was instructive.

They were confronted by four other policemen, on guard inside the gate.

"*Estos Señores*—" began the abject one.

"Take us to The Master," commanded Bell in a species of amused and superior scorn.

"It is required, Senor," said the leader of the four on guard, very respectfully, "it is required that none enter without being searched for weapons."

Bell laughed.

"Does The Master manage things so?" he asked

scornfully. "Now, where I am deputy no man would dare to think of a weapon to be used against me! If it is The Master's rule, though...."

The policeman cringed. Bell scornfully thrust an automatic out.

"Take it," he snapped. "And go and tell The Master that the Senores Bell and Jamison await his pleasure, and that they have given up their weapons."

The policeman scuttled toward the house. Bell smiled at his cigarette.

"Do you know, Bell," said Jamison dryly, in English, "I'd hate to play poker with you."

"I'm not bluffing," said Bell. "Not altogether. I've a four card flush, with the draw to come."

Almost instantly the policeman returned, more abject still. He had stammered out Bell's message, just as it was given him. And the slaves of The Master did not usually disobey orders, especially orders designed to

prevent any danger of a doomed man or woman trying to assassinate The Master before madness was complete. Bell and Jamison were received by liveried servants in utter silence and conducted through a long passageway, too long to have been contained entirely in the house as seen from the front. Indeed, they came out into a great open greenhouse, in which the smell of flowers was heavy. There were flowers everywhere, and a benign, small old man with a snowy beard and hair, sat at a desk as if chatting of amiable trivialities with the frock-coated men who stood about him. The white haired old man lifted a blossom delicately to his nostrils and inhaled its perfume with a sensitive delight. He looked up and smiled benignly upon the two.

It was then that Jamison got a shock surpassing all the rest. Bell's hands were writhing at the ends of his wrists, writhing as if they were utterly beyond his control and as if they were longing to rend and tear....

And Bell suddenly looked down at them, and his expression was that of a man who sees cobras at the ends of his arms.

CHAPTER 17

There was a long pause. Bell was very calm. He seemed to tear his eyes from the writhing hands that were peculiarly sensate, as if under the control of an intelligence alien to his own.

"I believe," said Bell steadily, "that The Master wishes to speak to me."

With an apparent tremendous effort of will, he thrust his hands into his pockets. Jamison cursed softly. Bell had taken the direction of things entirely out of his hands. It only remained to play up.

"To be sure," said a mild, benevolent voice. The man with the snowy beard regarded Bell exactly in the fashion of an elderly philanthropist. "I am The Master, Senor Bell. You have interested me greatly. I have grown to have a great admiration for you. Will you be seated? Your companion also pleases me. I would like"—and the mild brown eyes beamed at him—"I would like to have your friendship, Senor Bell."

"Pull out a chair for me, Jamison," said Bell in a strained voice. "And—I'd like to have a cigarette."

Jamison, cursing under his breath, put a chair behind Bell and stuck a cigarette between his lips. He held a match, though his hands shook.

"You might sit down, too," said Bell steadily. "From the manner of The Master, I imagine that the conversation will take some time."

He inhaled deeply of his cigarette, and faced the little man again. And The Master looked so benevolent that he seemed absolutely cherubic, and there was absolutely no sign of anything but the utmost saintliness about him. His eyes were clear and mild. His complexion was fresh and translucent. The wrinkles that showed upon his face were those of an amiable and a serene soul filled with benevolence and charity. He looked like one of those irritatingly optimistic old gentlemen who habitually carry small coins and stray bits of candy in their pockets for such small children as they may converse with under the smiling eyes of nurses.

"Ah, Senor Bell," he said gently. "You do cause me to admire you. May I see your hands again?"

Bell held them out. He seemed to have conquered their writhing to some extent. But he could not hold them quite still. Sweat stood out on his forehead. He thrust them abruptly out of sight again.

"Sad," said The Master gently. "Very sad." He sighed faintly and laid down the rose he had been toying with. His fingers caressed the soft petals delicately. "Fortunately," he said benevolently, "it is not yet too late for me to relieve the strain under which you labor, Senor. May I send for a certain medicine which will dispose of those symptoms in a very short time?"

"We'll talk first," said Bell harshly. "I want to hear what you have to say."

The Master nodded, his fingers touching the rose petals as if in a sensitive pleasure in their texture.

"Always courageous," he said benignly. "I admire it while I combat it. But the Senor Jamison...."

Jamison had been looking fascinatedly at his own hands, opening and closing the fingers with a savage abruptness. They obeyed him, though they trembled.

"I didn't drink the damned stuff that hotel keeper brought us last night," he growled. "Bell did. And I—"

"Wait a minute, Jamison," said Bell evenly. "Let's talk to The Master for a while. I swore, sir," he said grimly, "that I'd kill you. I've seen what your devilish poison does, in the hands of the men you've chosen to distribute it. I've seen"—he swallowed and said harshly—"I've seen enough to make me desire nothing so much as to see you roast in hell! But you wanted to talk to me. Go ahead!"

The Master beamed at him, and then glanced about at the frock-coated men who had been attending him. Bell glanced at them. Ribiera was there, chuckling.

"I told you, *tio mio*," he said familiarly, "that he would not be polite. You can do nothing with him. Better have him shot."

Francia, of Paraguay, nodded amusedly to Bell as their eyes met. But The Master shook his really rather beautiful head. An old man can be good to look at, and with a saintly aureole of snow-white hair and the patriarchal white beard, The Master was the picture of benign and beautiful old age.

"Ah, you do not understand," he protested mildly. "The more the Senor Bell shows his courage, *hijo mio*, the more we must persuade him." He turned to Bell. "I realise," he said gently, "that there are hardships connected with the administration of my power, Senor. It is inevitable. But the Latin races of the continent which is now nearly mine require strong handling. They require a strong man to lead them. They are comfortable only under despotism. The task I have chosen for you is different, entirely. *Los Americanos del Norte* will not respond to the treatment which is necessary for those *del Sud*. Their governments, their traditions, are entirely unlike. If you become my deputy and viceroy for all your nation, you shall rule as you will. A benevolent, yet strong, rule is needed for your people. It may even be—I will

permit it—that the democratic institutions of your nation may continue if you so desire. I am offering you, Senor, the position of the absolute ruler of your nation. You may interfere with the present government not at all, if you choose, provided only that my own commands are obeyed when relayed through you. I choose you because you have courage, and resource, and because you have the *Yanqui* cleverness which will understand your nation and cope with it."

Bell inhaled deeply.

"In other words," he said bitterly, "you're saying indirectly that you offer me a chance to be the sort of ruler Americans will submit to without too much fuss, because you think one of Ribiera's stamp would drive them to rebellion."

The fine dark eyes twinkled.

"You have much virtue, Senor. My nephew—though he is to be my successor—has a weakness for a pretty face. Would you prefer that I give him the task of

subduing your nation?"

"You might try it," said Bell. His eyes gleamed. "He'd be dead within a week."

The Master laughed softly.

"I like you, *Senor*. I do like you indeed. I have not been so defied since another *Americano del Norte* defied me in this same room. But he had not your resource. He had been enslaved with much less difficulty than yourself. I do not remember what happened to him...."

"He was taken, Master," said a fat man with hard eyes, obsequiously, "he was taken in Bolivia." It was the man whom Bell had seen earlier that morning in a carriage. "You gave him to me. He had insulted me when I ordered him sent to you. I had him killed, but he was very obstinate."

"Ah, yes," said The Master meditatively. "You told me the details." He seemed to recall small facts in benevolent retrospection. "But you, *Senor Bell*, I have

need of you. In fact, I shall insist upon your friendship. And therefore—"

He beamed upon Bell.

"I give you back the Senorita Canalejas."

He shook his head reproachfully at the utterly grim look in Bell's eyes.

"I shall give you one single portion of the antidote to the medicine which makes your hands behave so badly. You may take it when you please. The Senor Jamison I shall keep and enslave. I do not think he will be as obstinate as you are, but he has excellent qualities. If you prove obdurate, I may yet persuade him to undertake certain tasks for me. But you and the Senorita Canalejas are free. Your boat has been reprovisioned and provided with fuel. You may go from here where you will."

Ribiera snarled.

"*Tio mio*," he protested angrily, "you promised me—"

"Your will in many things," said The Master gently, "but not in all. Remember that you have much to learn, *hijo mio*. I have taught you to prepare my little medicine, it is true. That is so you can take my place if age infirmity shall carry me away." The Master folded his hands with an air of pious resignation. "But you must learn policy. The Senorita Canalejas belongs to the Senor Bell."

Jamison was staring, now, but Bell's eyes had narrowed to mere slits.

"You see," said The Master gently, to him, "I desire your friendship. You may go where you will. You may take the Senorita Canalejas with you. You will have enough of the antidote to my little medicine to keep you sane for perhaps a week. In one week you may go far, with her. You may do many things. But you cannot find a place of safety for her. I still have a little power, Senor. If you take her with you, your hands will writhe again. Your body will become uncontrollable. Your eyes, staring and horror-struck, will observe your own hands rending her. While your brain is yet sane you will see this body of yours which now desires her so

ardently, tearing at and crushing that delicate figure, gouging out her eyes, battering her tender flesh, destroying her.... Have you ever seen what a man who has taken my little medicine does to a human being at his mercy?"

The figures about The Master were peculiarly tense. The fat man with the hard eyes laughed suddenly. It was a horrible laugh. Francia of Paraguay took out his handkerchief and delicately wiped his lips. He was smiling. Ribiera looked at Bell's face and chuckled. His whole gross figure shook with his amusement.

"And of course," said The Master benignly, "if you prefer to commit suicide, if you prefer to leave her here—well, my nephew knows little expedients to reduce her will to compliance. You recall *Yagué*, among others."

Bell's face was a white mask of horror and fury. He tried to speak, and failed. He raised his hand to his throat—and it tore at the flesh, insanely.

"Let—let me see her," croaked Bell, as if strangling.

Jamison stiffened. Bell seemed to be trying to get his hands into his pockets. They were apparently uncontrollable. He thrust them under his coat as there was a stirring at the door.

And Paula was brought in, as if she had been waiting. She was entirely colorless, but she smiled at Bell. She came quickly to his side.

"I heard," she said in a clear and even little voice. "We will go together, Charles. If there is a week in which we can be together, it will be so much of happiness. And when you are—The Master's victim, we will let the little boat sink, and sink with it. I do not wish to live without you, Charles, and you do not wish to live as his slave."

Bell gave utterance to a sudden laugh that was like a bark. His hands came out from under his coat. Dangling from each one was a small, pear-shaped globule of metal. A staff projected upward from each one, and he held those staffs in his writhing hands. About each wrist was a tiny loop of cord that went down to a pin at the base of the staffs.

"Close to me, Paula," he said coldly. She clung to his arm. He moved forward, with half-a-dozen revolver muzzles pointed at his breast.

"If one of you damned fools fires," he said harshly, "I'll let go. When I let go—these are Mills grenades, and they go off in three seconds after they leave the hand. Stand still!"

There was a terrible, frozen silence. Then a movement from behind Bell. Jamison was rising with a grunt.

"Some day, Bell," he observed coolly, "I'll be on to all of your curves. This is the best one yet. But you're likely to let go at any second, aren't you?"

"Like hell!" raged Bell. "I drank some of your poison," he snarled at The Master. "Yes! I was fool enough to do it! But I took what measures any man will take who finds he's swallowed poison. I got it out of my stomach at once. And if you or one of these deputies tries to move...."

Ribiera had blanched to a pasty gray. The Master was frozen. But Bell saw Riviera's eyes move in swift calculation. There was a solid wall behind The Master. It seemed as if the greenhouse were a sort of passageway between two larger structures. And there was a door almost immediately behind Riviera. Riviera glanced right—left—

He flung himself through that door. He knew the secret of The Master's power. He was The Master's appointed successor. If The Master and all his deputies died, Riviera....

But Bell snapped into action like a bent spring released. His arm shot forward. A grenade went hurtling through the door through which Riviera had fled. There was an instantaneous, terrific explosion. The solid wall shook and shivered and, with a vast deliberation, collapsed. The greenhouse was full of crushed plaster dust. Panes of glass shivered....

But Bell was upon The Master. He had struck the little man down and stood over him, his remaining automatic replacing the grenade he had thrown.

"Ribiera's dead," he snapped, "and if I'm shot The Master dies too and you all go mad! Stand back!"

The deputies stood frozen.

"I think," said Jamison composedly, "I take a hand now. I'll pick him up, Bell.... Right. I've got him. With a grenade hanging down his back. If he jerks away from me, or I from him, it will blow his spine to bits."

"Hold him so," said Bell coldly.

He went coolly to where he could look over the heap of the collapsed wall. He saw a bundle of torn clothing that had been a man. It was flung against a cracked and tottering chimney.

"Right," he said evenly. "Ribiera's dead, all right."

He turned to the deputies, whose revolvers were still in their hands.

"The Master's carriage, please," he said politely. "To the door. You may accompany us if you please, but in

other carriages. I am working for the release of all the Master's slaves, and you among them if you choose. But you can see very easily that there is no hope of the release of The Master without the meeting of my terms."

The Master spoke, softly and mildly and without fear.

"It is my order that the Senor Bell is to be obeyed. I shall return. You need have no fear of my death. My carriage."

A man went stiffly, half-paralyzed with terror, to where chattering scared servants were grouped in the awful fear that came upon the slaves of The Master at any threat to his rule.

But Bell and Paula and Jamison went slowly and cautiously—though they held the whip hand—to the entrance door of the house, and out to the entrance gate. A carriage was already before the door when they reached it, and others were drawing up in a line behind it.

"Get in," said Bell briefly. "Down to the waterfront."

He turned to the group of frock-coated, stricken men who had followed.

"Some of you men," he said coldly, "had better go on ahead and warn the police and the public generally about the certainty of The Master's death if any attempt is made to rescue him."

Francia, of Paraguay, summoned a swagger and raised his hand to the second carriage. It drew in to the curb.

"I will attend to it, Senor Bell," he said politely. "Ah, when I think that I once raised my revolver to shoot you and refrained!"

He drove off swiftly.

Bell's eyes were glowing. He got into the carriage, and such a procession drove through the streets of Punta Arenas as has rarely moved through the streets of any city in the world. The long line of carriages

moved at a funereal pace amid a surging, terrified mob. The Master beamed placidly as he looked out over white, starkly agonized faces. Some of the people groaned audibly. A few cursed The Master in their despair. More cursed Bell, not daring to strike or fire on him. But he would have been torn to bits if he had stepped from the carriage for an instant.

"Bell," said Jamison dryly, "considering that I'm prepared to be blown apart on three seconds notice, it is peculiar that this mob frightens me."

The Master's eyes twinkled benignly. He seemed totally insensible to fear.

"You need not be afraid," he said gently. "They will not touch you unless I order them."

Jamison stared down at the little man whose collar he held firmly, with a Mills grenade dangling down at the base of his neck.

"I wouldn't order them to attack, if I were you," he said coldly. "I haven't Bell's brains, but I have just as

much dislike for you as he has."

They came to the harbor. Bell spoke again.

"The carriage is to drive out to the end of one of the docks, and no one else is to go out on that dock."

The Master relayed the order in his mild voice, but as the coachman obeyed him he clucked his tongue commiseratingly.

"Senor Bell," he protested gently. "You do not expect to escape! Not after killing me! Why that is absurd!"

Bell said nothing. He alighted from the carriage, his face set grimly, and stared ashore at the long, long row of terrified faces staring out at him. The whole waterfront seemed to be lined with staring faces. Wails came from that mass of enslaved human beings.

"Hold him here, Jamison," he said drearily. "I'm going out to look at that big plane. There's a rowboat tied to the dock, here."

He swung down the side into the dock and rowed off into the harbor, while the horses attached to The Master's carriage pawed impatiently at the wooden flooring of the dock. Bell reached the two planes anchored on the still harbor water. The smaller one had brought them down from Buenos Aires. The larger one had gone after the beached amphibian and brought it and Paula on to the city. Bell, from the shore, was seen to be investigating the larger one. He came rowing back.

His head appeared above the dock edge.

"All right," he said tiredly. "The Master has a rule requiring all his ships ready for instant flight. Very useful. The big plane is fueled and full of oil. We'll go out to it and take off."

Jamison lifted The Master to his feet and with a surge of muscles swept him down to the flooring of the dock.

"Paula first," said Bell, "and then The Master, and then you, Jamison."

"One moment," said The Master reproachfully. "It would be cruel not to let me reassure my subjects. I will give an order."

Bell and Jamison listened suspiciously. But he spoke gently to the coachman.

"You will tell the deputies," said The Master in Spanish, "that a month's supply of medicine for all my subjects will be found in my laboratory. And you may tell them that I shall return before the end of that time."

The coachman's eyes filled with a passionate relief.

"Now," said The Master placidly, "I am ready for our little jaunt."

Paula descended the ladder and seated herself in the bow of the boat. Bell covered The Master grimly with his automatic as he descended, with surprising agility. Jamison came down last, and resumed his former grip on The Master's collar. Bell rowed out to the big plane.

Jamison kept close watch while Bell started the four huge motors and throttled them down to warming up speed, and while he hauled up the anchor with which the huge seaplane was anchored.

The dock was covered with a swarm of panic stricken folk.



[Image description start: A black and white illustration showing a crowd of horrified people looking at something offscreen. Image description

end.]

Everywhere, all the inhabitants of the city who were slaves to The Master had come in awful terror to watch. And all the inhabitants of the city were slaves to The Master. Some of them fell to their knees and held out imploring arms to Bell, begging him for mercy and the return of The Master. Some cursed wildly.

But, with his jaws set grimly, Bell gave the motors the gun.

The big plane moved heavily, then more swiftly through the water. It lifted slowly, and rose, and rose, and dwindled to a speck high in the air.

And all through the streets and ways of Punta Arenas, fear stalked almost as a tangible thing. Panic hovered over the housetops, always ready to descend. Terror was in the air that every man breathed, and every human being looked at every other human being with staring, haunted eyes. Punta Arenas was waiting for its murder madness to begin.

CHAPTER 18

There were four motors to pull the big plane through the air, and their roaring was a vast thundering noise which the earth re-echoed. But inside the cabin that tumult was reduced to a not intolerable humming sound.

"What'll I do with this devil, Bell?" asked Jamison.

"Now that we're aloft, I confess this grenade makes me nervous. I'm holding it so tightly my fingers are getting cramped."

"Tie him up," said Bell, without looking. "He'll talk presently."

Movements. The plane flew on, swaying slightly in the way of big sea-planes everywhere. A williwaw began in the hills ahead and swept out and set the ship to reeling crazily in its erratic currents. The Strait vanished and there were tumbled hills below them. Minutes passed.

"Got him fixed up," said Jamison coolly, "I'll guarantee

he won't break loose. Got any plans, Bell?"

"No time," said Bell. "I haven't had time to make any. The first thing is to get where his folk will never find us. Then we'll see what we can do with him."

Paula looked at the now bound figure of The Master. And the little old man beamed at her.

"He—he's smiling!" said Paula, in a voice that was full of a peculiar horrified shock.

Bell shrugged. Punta Arenas was all of twenty-five miles behind, and the earth over which they flew began to take on the shape of an island. Water appeared beyond it, and innumerable small islands. Bell began to rack his brain for the infinitesimal scraps of knowledge he had about this section of the world. It was pitifully scanty. Punta Arenas was the southernmost point of the continental mass. All about it was an archipelago and a maze of waterways, thinly inhabited everywhere and largely without any inhabitants at all. The only solid ground between Cape Horn and the Antarctic ice pack was Diego

Ramirez and the South Shetlands....

Nothing to go on. But any sufficiently isolated and desolate spot would do. Almost anywhere along the southern edge of the continental islands should serve.

The plane roared on monotonously, while Bell began to wrestle with another and more serious problem. In three days—two, now—an American naval vessel would turn up, with scientists and chemists on board. It was to be doubted whether anything like an overt act would be risked by that vessel. If all the governments of South America were under The Master's thumb, then cabled orders from his deputies would race three navies to the spot. And the government of the United States does not like to start war, anywhere. Certainly it would not willingly enter into a conflict with the whole southern continent for the solution of a problem that so far affected that continent alone. The Master's kidnapping had solved nothing, so far.

Jamison tapped his shoulder.

"No pursuit, so far," he observed coolly. "I've looked."
Bell nodded.

"They don't dare. Not yet, anyhow. They're depending on The Master. How is he?"

"Smiling peacefully to himself, damn him!" snarled Jamison. "Do you know what we're up against?"

"Ourselves," said Bell coldly. "But I'm nearly licked. He's got to talk!"

Jamison moved away again. The earth below looked as if it had been torn to shreds in some titanic convulsion of ages past. The sea was everywhere, and so was land! There were little threads of silver interlacing and crossing and wavering erratically in every conceivable direction. And there were specks of islands—rocks only yards in extent—and islands of every imaginable size and shape, with their surfaces in every possible state of upheaval and distortion. A broader mass of land appeared ahead and to the left.

"Tierra del Fuego again," muttered Bell. "If we cross

it...."

For fifteen minutes the plane thundered across desolate, rocky hills. Then the maze of islets again. Bell scanned them keenly, and saw a tiny steamer traveling smokily, for no conceivable reason, among the scattered bits of stone. The sea appeared, stretching out toward infinity.

Bell rose, to survey a wider space. He swung to the left, so that he was heading nearly southeast, and went on down toward that desolation of desolations, the stormy cape which faces the eternal ice of the antarctic. He was five thousand feet up, then, and scanning sea and earth and sky....

And suddenly he swung sharply to the right and headed out toward the open sea. He felt a small figure pressing against his shoulder. Presently fingers closed tightly upon his sleeve. He glanced down at Paula and managed to smile.

"There are some rocks out there," he told her quietly. "Islands, I think, and Diego Ramirez, at a guess."

They were specks, no more, but they were vastly more distinct from the plane than from Mount Beaufoy. That is on Henderson Island in New Year Sound, and its seventeen-hundred-foot peak was almost below Bell when he sighted the islands. But the islands have been seen full fifty miles from there.

It took the plane nearly forty minutes to cover the space, but long before that the islands had become distinct. Two tiny groups of scattered rocks, the whole group hardly five miles in length and by far the greater number no more than boulders surrounded by sheets of foam from breakers. Two of them merited the name of islands. The nearer was high and bare and precipitous. No trace of vegetation showed upon it. The farther was smaller, and at its northern corner a little cove showed, nearly land-locked.

Bell descended steeply. The big plane plunged wildly in the air eddies about the taller island at five hundred feet, but steadied and went winging on down lower, and lower.... The waves between the two islands were not high, but the seaplane alighted with a mighty, a tremendous splashing, and Bell navigated

it grimly though clumsily into the mouth of the cove. There a small beach showed. He went very slowly toward it. Presently he swung abruptly about. A wing tip float grounded close to the shore.

The motors cut off and left a thunderous silence. Bell climbed atop the cabin and let go the anchor.

"We're here," he said shortly. "Bring The Master and we'll go ashore."

The catwalk painted on the lower wing guided them. Bell jumped to the rocks first, and stumbled, and then rose to lift Paula down and take The Master's small, frail body from Jamison's arms.

"You looked for a gun?" asked Bell

"He'd nothing to fight with," said Jamison heavily. He had been facing the same problem Bell had worked on desperately, and had found no answer. But he shuddered a little as he looked about the island.

There was nothing in sight but rock. No moss. No

lichens. Not even stringy grass or the tufty scrub bushes that seemed able to grow anywhere.

Bell untied The Master, carefully but without solicitude. The little man sat up, and brushed himself off carefully, and arranged himself in a comfortable position.

"I am an old man," said The Master in mild reproach. "You might at least have given me a cushion to sit upon."

Bell sat down and lighted a cigarette with fingers that did not tremble in the least.

"Suppose," he said hardly, "you talk. First, of what your poison is made. Second, of what the antidote is made. Third, how we may be sure you tell the truth."

The Master looked at him with bright, shrewd, and apparently kindly old eyes.

"*Hijo mio*," he said mildly, "I am an old man. But I am obstinate. I will tell you nothing."

Bell's eyes glowed coldly.

"Does it occur to you," he asked grimly, "that it's too important a matter for us to have any scruples about? That we can—and will—make you talk?"

"You may kill me," said The Master benignly, "but that is all."

"And," said Bell, still more grimly, "we have only to get back in the plane yonder, and go away...."

The Master beamed at him. Presently he began to laugh softly.

"*Hijo mio*," he said gently, "let us stop this little byplay. You will take me back in my airplane, and you will land me at Punta Arenas. And then you will fly away. I concede you freedom, but that is all. You cannot leave me here."

"Paula," said Bell coldly, "get in the plane again. Jamison—"

Paula rose doubtfully. Jamison stood up. The Master continued to chuckle amiably.

"You see," he said cherubically, "you happen to be a gentleman, Senor Bell. Every man has some weakness. That is yours. And you will not leave me here to die, because you have killed my nephew, who was the only other man who knew how to prepare my little medicine. And you know, Senor, that all my subjects will wish to die. Those who do, in fact," he added mildly, "will be fortunate. The effect of my little medicine does not make for happiness without its antidote."

Bell's hands clenched.

"You know," said The Master comfortably, "that there are many thousands of people whose hands will writhe, very soon. The city of Punta Arenas will be turned into a snarling place of maniacs within a very little while—if I do not return. Would you like, Senor, to think in after days of that pleasant city filled with men and women tearing each other like beasts? Of little children, even, crouching, and crushing and

rending the tender flesh of other little children? Of
lissing little ones gone—"

"Stop!" snarled Bell, in a frenzy. "Damn your soul!
You're right! I can't! You win—so far!"

"Always," said The Master benevolently. "I win
always. And you forget, Senor. You have seen the
worst side of my rule. The revolutions, the rebellions
that have made men free, were they pretty things to
watch? Always, *amigo*, the worst comes. But when my
rule is secure, then you shall see."

He waved a soft, beautifully formed hand. From every
possible aspect the situation was a contradiction of all
reason. The bare, black, salt encrusted rocks with no
trace of vegetation showing. The gray water rumbling
and surging among the uneven rocks at the base of
the shore, while gulls screamed hoarsely overhead.
The white haired little man with his benevolent face,
smiling confidently at the two grim men.

"The time will come," said The Master gently, and in
the tone of utter confidence with which one states an

inescapable fact, "the time will come when all the earth will know my rule. The taking of my little medicine will be as commonplace a thing as the smoking of tobacco, which I abhor, Senores. You are mistaken about there being an antidote and a poison. It is one medicine only. One little compound. A vegetable substance, Senior Bell, combined with a product of modern chemistry. It is a synthetic drug. Modern chemistry is a magnificent science, and my little medicine is its triumph. Even my deputies have not heard me speak so, Senores."

Bell snarled wordlessly, but if one had noticed his eyes they would have been seen to be curiously cool and alert and waiting. The Master leaned forward, and for once spoke seriously, almost reverently.

"There shall be a forward step, Senores, in the race of men. Do you know the difference between the brain of a man and that of an anthropoid ape? It consists only of a filmy layer of cortex, a film of gray nerve cells which the ape has not. And that little layer creates the difference between ape and man. And I have discovered more. My little medicine acts upon that

film. Administered in the tiny quantities I have given to my slaves, it has no perceptible effect. It is merely a compound of a vegetable substance and a synthetic organic base. It is not excreted from the body. Like lead, it remains always in solution in the blood. But in or out of the blood it changes, always, to the substance which causes murder madness. Fresh or changed, my little medicine acts upon the brain."

He smiled brightly upon them.

"But though in tiny quantities it has but little effect, in larger quantities—when fresh it makes the functioning of the gray cells of the human brain as far superior to the unmedicated gray cells, as those human gray cells are to the white cells of the ape! That is what I have to offer to the human race! Intelligence for every man, which shall be as the genius of the past!"

He laughed softly.

"Think, Senores! Compare the estate of men with the estate of apes! Compare the civilization which will

arise upon the earth when men's brains are as far above their present level as the present level is above the anthropoid! The upward steps of the human race under my rule will parallel, will surpass the advance from the brutish caveman to intellectual genius. But I have seen, Senores, the one danger in my offering."

There was silence. Jamison shook his head despairingly. The Master could not see him. He formed the word with his lips.

"Crazy!"

But Bell said coldly:

"Go on."

"I must rule," said The Master soberly. "It is essential. If my little secret were known, intelligences would be magnified, but under many flags and with many aims. Scientists, with genius beside which Newton's pales, would seek out deadly weapons for war. The world would destroy itself of its own genius. But under my rule—"

"Men go mad," said Bell coldly.

The Master smiled reproachfully.

"Ah, you are trying to make me angry, so that I will betray something! You are clever, Senor Bell. With my little medicine, in such quantities as I would administer it to you...."

"You describe it," said Bell harshly and dogmatically, "as a brain stimulant. But it drives men mad."

"To be sure," said The Master mildly. "It does. It is not excreted from the body save very, very slowly. But it changes in the blood stream. As—let us say—sugar changes into alcohol in digestion. The end-product of my little medicine is a poison which attacks the brain. But the slightest bit of unchanged medicine is an antidote. It is"—he smiled amiably—"it is as if sugar in the body changed to alcohol, and alcohol was a poison, but sugar—unchanged—was an antidote. That is it exactly. You see that I have taken my little medicine for years, and it has not harmed me."

"Which," said Bell—and somehow his manner made utter silence fall so that each word fell separately into a vast stillness—"which, thank God, is the one thing that wins finally, for me!"

He stood up and laughed. Quite a genuine laugh.

"Paula," he said comfortably, "get on the plane. In the cabin. Jamison and I are going to strip The Master."

Paula stared. The Master looked at him blankly. Jamison frowned bewilderedly, but stood up grimly to obey.

"But Senor," said The Master in gentle dignity, "merely to humiliate me—"

"Not for that," said Bell. He laughed again. "But all the time I've been hearing about the stuff, I've noticed that nobody thought of it as a drug. It was a poison. People were poisoned. They did not become addicts. But you—you are the only addict to your drug."

He turned to Jamison, his eyes gleaming.

"Jamison," he said softly, "did you ever know of a drug addict who could bear to think of ever being without a supply of his drug—*right on his person*?"

Jamison literally jumped.

"By God! No!"

The Master was quick. He was swarming up the plane-wing tip before Jamison reached him, and he kicked frenziedly when Jamison plucked him off. But then it was wholly, entirely, utterly horrible that the little white haired man, whose face and manner had seemed so cherubic and so bland, should shriek in so complete a blind panic as they forced his fingers open and took a fountain pen away from him.

"This is it," said Bell in a deep satisfaction. "This is his point of weakness."

The Master was ghastly to look at, now. Jamison held him gently enough, considering everything, but The Master looked at that fountain pen as one might look at Paradise.

"I—I swear," he gasped. "I—swear I will give you the formula!"

"You might lie," said Jamison grimly.

"I swear it!" panted The Master in agony. "It—If the formula is known it—can be duplicated! It—the excretion can be hastened! It can all be forced from the body! Simply! So simply! If only you know! I will tell you how it is done! The medicine is the cacodylate of—"

Bell was leaning forward, now, like a runner breasting the tape at the end of a long and exhausting race.

"I'll trade," he said softly. "Half the contents of the pen for the formula. The other half we'll need for analysis. Half the stuff in the pen for the formula for freeing your slaves!"

The Master sobbed.

"A—a pencil!" he gasped. "I swear—"

Jamison gave him a pencil and a notebook. He wrote, his hands shaking. Jamison read inscrutably.

"It doesn't mean anything to me," he said soberly, "but you can read it. It's legible."

Bell smiled faintly. With steady finger he took his own fountain pen from his pocket. He emptied it of ink, and put a scrupulous half of a milky liquid from The Master's pen into it. He passed it over.

"Your medicine," said Bell quietly, "may taste somewhat of ink, but it will not be poisonous. Now, what do we do with you? I give you your choice. If we take you with us, you will be held very secretly as a prisoner until the truth of the information you have given us can be proven. And if your slaves have all been freed, then I suppose you will be tried...."

The Master was drawn and haggard. He looked very, very old and beaten.

"I—I would prefer," he said dully, "that you did not tell where I am, and that you go away and leave me here.

I—I may have some subjects who will search for me, and—they may discover me here.... But I am beaten, Senor. You know that you have won."

Bell swung up on the wing of the plane. He explored about in the cabin. He came back.

"There are emergency supplies," he said coldly. "We will leave them with you, with such things as may be useful to allow you to hope as long as possible. I do not think you will ever be found here."

"I—prefer it, Senor," said The Master dully. "I—I will catch fish...."

Jamison helped put the packages ashore. The Master shivered. Bell stripped off his coat and put it on top of the heap of packages. The Master did not stir. Bell laid a revolver on top of his coat. He went out to the plane and started the motors. The Master watched apathetically as the big seaplane pulled clumsily out of the little cove. The rumble of the engines became a mighty roar. It started forward with a rush, skimmed the water for two hundred yards or so, and suddenly

lifted clear to go floating away through the air toward the north.

Paula was the only one who looked back.

"He's crying," she said uncomfortably.

"It isn't fear," said Bell quietly. "It's grief at the loss of his ambition. It may not seem so to you two, but I believe he meant all that stuff he told me. He was probably really aiming, in his own way, for an improved world for men to live in."

The plane roared on. Presently Bell said shortly:

"That stuff he has won't last indefinitely. I'm glad I left him that revolver."

Jamison stirred suddenly. He dug down in his pocket and fished out a cigar.

"Since I feel that I may live long enough to finish smoking this," he observed dryly, "I think I'll light it. I haven't felt that I had twenty minutes of life ahead of

me for a long time, now. A sense of economy made me smoke cigarettes. It wouldn't be so much waste if you left half a cigarette behind you when you were killed."

The tight little cabin began to reek of the tobacco. Paula pressed close to Bell.

"But—Charles," she asked hopefully, "is—is it really all right, now?"

"I think so," said Bell, frowning. "Our job's over, anyhow. We go up the Chilean coast and find that navy boat. We turn our stuff over to them. They'll take over the task of seeing that every doctor, everywhere in South America, knows how to get The Master's poison out of the system of anybody who's affected. Some of them won't be reached, but most of them will. I looked at his formula. Standard drugs, all of them. There won't be any trouble getting the news spread. The Master's slaves will nearly go crazy with joy. And," he added grimly, "I'm going to see to it that the Rio police take back what they said about us. I think we'll have enough pull to demand that much!"

He was silent for a moment or so, thinking.

"I do think, Jamison," he said presently, "we did a pretty good job."

Jamison grunted.

"If—if it's really over," said Paula hopefully, "Charles —"

"What?"

"You—will be able to think about me sometimes," asked Paula wistfully, "instead of about The Master always?"

Bell stared down at her.

"Good Lord!" he groaned. "I have been a brute, Paula! But I've been loving you—" He stopped, and then said with the elaborate politeness and something of the customary idiotic air of a man making such an announcement. "I say, Jamison, did you know Paula and I were to be married?"

Jamison snorted. Then he said placidly:

"No. Of course not. I never dreamed of such a thing. When did this remarkably original idea occur to you?"

He puffed a huge cloud of smoke from his cigar. It was an unusually vile cigar. Bell scowled at him helplessly for a moment and then said wrathfully:

"Oh, go to hell!"

And he bent over and kissed Paula.